

Diss A3.B17 F4

THE RELATION BETWEEN COURT & LITERATURE  
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

(1579 - 1700)

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Thesis for the M.A. Examination.

BIRMINGHAM, 1917.

Diss. A3.B17/F

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## THE COURT I.

Any attempt to trace the relation between the Court and the literature of the 17th. Century must be preceded by some definition of the Court and a brief record of the changes that came over it during the period under discussion. This will facilitate an appreciation of the nature of the relationship between the two. We are here only concerned with the social side of Court life, and its influence on the literature of the period. The royal theories and interests in matters of government, and the literature produced in support or refutation of these tenets, we need not consider, since they would necessitate our forsaking the Court for the larger field of politics. The influence too of culture on contemporary literature must be approached with care. Early in Elizabeth's reign the Court was the main abode of learning, - scholar and courtier were almost interchangeable terms - but in the course of time the Renaissance influence spread to other branches of society, with the result that now it is often difficult to distinguish between those things due to the court and those due to learning only.

The Court was an assemblage of persons of noble rank whose interests were centred in the Sovereign. It was they who determined the standard of manners and diction for the nation at large, and whatever enjoyed courtly favour was sure to stimulate imitation. On the accession of Queen Elizabeth new ideals of Court life came into being, which altered the whole tone of

*Cour. Hope: History of Eng. lit. 1. 1. 1.*

society and left a corresponding change <sup>in</sup> ~~on~~ contemporary literature.<sup>2/</sup> By the year 1579, which saw the publication of "Euphues" and "The Shepherd's Calendar", Elizabeth's reign was within easy reach of its highest literary successes, and was about to break forth into that dazzling brilliance which was only possible in a Court like that of Elizabeth. The darkness of the Middle Ages was scarcely dispersed when the Queen ascended the throne, but the fact that the new Sovereign was a woman, and moreover a woman of learning and of determination, made her the inspirer of new ideals, the leader of the Renaissance in England, and the symbol of the nation's greatness. The despotic and clever daughter of Henry VIII became the very embodiment of the spirit of her time, with all its energy, vitality and brilliance—even its foibles. A new conception of Court life became necessary to meet the needs of so novel a situation as the rule of a woman. The last dying embers of chivalry were rekindled in honour of the Virgin Queen. The courtier of her reign, besides being skilled in the use of martial weapons, had also to be a man of parts, well versed in all branches of learning, and adorned with numerous courtly accomplishments<sup>1</sup> in accordance with Castiglione's "Il Cortegiano", which was the manual of courtly conduct.

The Court, then, became the centre of the social life of the nation, while the Queen was worshipped as the source of its

~~Courthope~~: "History of English Poetry"

<sup>1</sup> Einstein: "Italian Influence in English Literature"

<sup>2</sup> Preface to Hoby's translation of "Il Cortegiano"

greatness. From the first she possessed a keen sense of the needs of the people, to whom she was bound. She loved England and the English, and in return she was her people's darling. Her skill and diplomacy in guiding the nation through its most critical years endeared all hearts to her, and filled them with a sense of security from all dangers and irksome controversies while she held sway. The people wove about her name an atmosphere of reverence and honoured her as the incarnation of all moral and political virtues. It was in this way that she became endued with a wonderful power of calling out the latent force of the nation. Her influence lay in her reputation rather than in her actual merits.

It was thus that Elizabeth came to identify herself with the spirit of the nation at large. Her wonderful power of inspiring a national ideal, coupled with the authority always attendant on a sceptre, procured for her the position of presiding genius over the far-reaching expansion which characterised her reign.<sup>2</sup> The increase of her glory was sometimes made the pretext for voyages of discovery - though perhaps with no small degree of exaggerated flattery - with the energy and vitality of the Elizabethan age, which took their rise in the Court life,<sup>3</sup> have left their mark on

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's England. Clarendon Press 1916. Chap. I. Age of Elizabeth by Raleigh.

<sup>2</sup> Gosse & Garnett: English Literature.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh de Selincourt: "Great Raleigh"  
"The centre of all this life, of all the genius for living was the Court and its illustrious head".

contemporary literature of men like Marlowe, Spenser and Shakespeare.

Without Elizabeth and her love of learning, the course of the Renaissance in England would have been seriously impeded, and the language would have suffered generations of delay before coming to ripeness and refinement.

Hence it is that the Court of Elizabeth, more than that of any other sovereign, was the centre of the intellectual and literary movements of the time. According to the new ideal, skill in warfare was no longer the sole accomplishment necessary for the qualifications of a gentleman. Castiglione demands that such a one should "be able to hold his own in the gallant society"<sup>1</sup> that surrounded the sovereign, and to write well both in prose and verse. In short, besides being a warrior, he must also be a scholar and lover of the fine arts. In his "Description of England" Harrison says "to the singular commendation of both sorts and sexes of our courtiers here in England, there are verie few of them which have not the use and skill of sundrie speaches, beside an excellent veine of writing beforetime not regarded. -- Truelie it is a rare thing with us now, to heare a courtier which hath but his owne language. And to say how many gentlewomen and ladies there are, that besides sound knowledge of the Greeke and Latine tonges, are thereto no lesse skilfull in the Spanish, Italian and French

<sup>1</sup> Preface to Hoby's translation of "Il Cortegiano"

or in some of them, it resteth not in me; sith I am persuaded that as the noblemen and gentlemen doo surmount in this behalfe so these come verie little or nothing at all behind them for their parts". Harrison then goes on to enumerate the ways in which ladies of the Court occupy their leisure hours, "some in continually reading either of the holie scriptures, or histories of our owne or forren nations about us, and diverse in writing volumes of their owne, or translating of other mens into our English and Latine toong".

It was by the transmission of taste that the Court was best able to assert an authority over the literary productions of the time. The national spirit of curiosity and love of novelty were given direction by the learned and cultured instincts of the Court. Elizabethan nobles were, for the most part, men of action and of restless activity, and it was they who became the pioneers of the famous discoveries of the age. Deeds such as these could not fail to leave their impression on the literature of Court and nation alike. Other court gallants journeyed through the better-known regions of Europe where they satisfied their curiosity by exploring foreign literatures, <sup>thus</sup> rendering service to their Country by bringing back to England an interest in the languages and the intellectual achievements of continental peoples. But Elizabethan



curiosity did not end here. This expansion of the Englishman's horizon, together with the growing spirit of national consciousness, led to an interest in England's past history, as well as in that of other peoples. Herein lay the inspiration of the works of men like Camden, Knolles, Daniel, Raleigh.<sup>1</sup>

In matters of literature, too, this love of novelty made itself felt. Our nation "rising like a noble and puissant giant out of slumber", realised the need of a diction corresponding to the altered condition of intellectual emancipation. Literary circles undertook the task of setting up a new and refined standard of language, which should be distinct from that used by the common people, and yet be the standard of diction for the nation at large. But they soon realised, however, that the crude - as they termed them - poetical forms of the "lack-learning" mediaeval ages were unworthy of this new diction. Consequently they ransacked ancient and modern foreign literatures for forms of versification worthy of a nation and language so great as ours.

Equally prominent at the Court of Elizabeth, was the love of Beauty, which, according to Castiglione, was to be regarded as the crowning possession of the perfect courtier. It was active in the taste for the classics, and found its realisation in the lofty ideals of men like Spenser and Sidney, whose aim

<sup>1</sup> Einstein: Italian Influence in English Literature and Cambridge History of Literature.

was noble living. The whole character of the altered Court life, with its luxury and splendour and gorgeous display, with its gallantry and elegance, its preoccupation in intellectual and literary activities, was determined by this love of Beauty. An attempt was made to do away with the barbarity of mediaeval manners and customs; chivalry, urbanity, elegance, were the order of the day. It was in accordance with this state of affairs that Spenser, in whom Beauty had its most ardent votary, undertook his "Faerie Queene" and Lyly his "Euphues". They set before themselves no less an aim than the fashioning of "a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline".

The Elizabethan love of Beauty is stamped in flaming letters on the literature of the period. It is seen in the rich and magnificent scenery of the "Faerie Queene" as well as in the charmingly delicate story of Cupid and the Bee, in the pictures of sensuous beauty in Marlowe's "Hero and Leander" and in the dainty and melodious love lyrics of Campion and Dowland. It is evident even in the great prose works of the time, which sparkle with poetical images and imaginative diction. In the matter of literary form it demanded elegance, and this sometimes even at the risk of artificiality. In the worship of outward beauty the quaintest conceits and the most insincere sentiments passed unquestioned. The poets who could produce

a series of sonnets, displaying skill in versification and elegance of expression, were held of great account, no matter whether the subject were an entirely imaginary lady, and the sentiments expressed borrowed from some foreign writer.

The taste for learning which characterised this age was the natural outcome of national curiosity and was given <sup>which may be regarded as the criterion of contemporary learning.</sup> direction by the Court. The Queen herself was a fine scholar. According to her tutor, Roger Ascham, she was well acquainted with Latin authors, and was an excellent Greek student. In the course of her progresses the Universities were wont to deliver lengthy addresses to her in the classical languages, and she was frequently present at academical debates carried on in Latin. She was moreover well versed in modern languages, and could hold intercourse with foreign ambassadors in their native tongue. All the courtiers too were able to converse freely in French and Italian. Elizabeth's Court was the audience-chamber of the learned both of England and the continent, to the best of whom she gave prominent positions in the Universities.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this interest in foreign literatures there sprang up a large body of English translations of which the Queen herself did not disdain to show approval by her own efforts in the same direction. Many of the learned men of the Court, who had the welfare of the English language and literature at heart, busied themselves with translations from the classics, by which means they accumulated a splendid

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's England. p. 111

<sup>2</sup> Williams: Influence of the Reformation on English Literature

body of material on which subsequent poets might work.

But Court interest did not end here; it penetrated every branch of literature. The Court took up the defence of poetry and gave force to its critical arguments by producing an abundance of verse. Every kind of poetry found a poet, and every courtier, from mighty men of action like Raleigh, to frivolous gallants like Oxford, tried their skill in versifying. The Drama, too, was held in high esteem among the nobility. The plays of John Lyly, with their mythological setting, their allegorical references calculated to suit the royal taste for intellectual gymnastics,<sup>1</sup> their superficial treatment of character to gratify the ephemeral emotions of <sup>the Court</sup> disposition,<sup>2</sup> were eminently popular. Shakespeare, too, wrote for the Court, and it has been reported of Elizabeth that his plays "took her".<sup>3</sup>

Towards the close of Elizabeth's reign, the gallantry and chivalry of her early Court degenerated into affectation and pedantry.<sup>3</sup> The courtiers grew restless and manifested eagerness to welcome a successor to the throne. The cause of this may be seen in the fact that all Elizabeth had stood for was passing away. The glory and brilliance of the greatest age in English history and literature were on the wane; its exuberant vitality and energy were almost spent,

<sup>1</sup> Feuillerat: Lyly.

<sup>2</sup> Fleay: Chronicle History of the London Stage.

<sup>3</sup> Aikin: James I.

and the Court felt itself on the brink of a new era, which it knew must come when the chief representative of the old ideals should cease to be.

Thus with the accession of James I an entire change came over the Court; the chivalry of another age was dead, though it still pretended to survive in frequent duelling on any slight pretext. Indeed the condition of James' Court could hardly be calculated to foster chivalry; it rather stifled it. Sir John Harrington, a godson and courtier of Queen Elizabeth, writing from the Court of James, says "I never did see such lack of good order, discretion and sobriety as I now have done", and Lady Arabella Stuart, in a letter to her uncle the Earl of Shrewsbury, deplores the absence of all chivalric spirit. "If ever there were such a virtue as courtesy at the Court I marvel what has become of it; for I protest I see little or none of it but in the Queen" whose example she cites as being the only reminiscence of the "attractive virtue of the Queen Elizabeth".

Besides this, there was no mutual bond between King and people. The nation felt no devotion to their sovereign, and the Court was lacking in any real sense of patriotism. The people resented royal interference in matters of religion, though they had blindly adapted their conscience to Elizabeth's dictates. The self-seeking motives of the King, his indolence

and remissness in affairs, soon became patent to them, and the result was an alienation of that implicit trust in the sovereign which had been Elizabeth's most powerful possession. No longer do we find reciprocal influence between Court and people. There is henceforth between the literature of the two parties a wide breach which continues to increase as time advances.

The taste too of James' Court left much to be desired. Cruel pastimes continued to enjoy great popularity among the nobility while the monarch himself sought his most congenial companions among buffoons and shallow-minded gallants. Though his Court was famous for a luxury and splendour exceeding even that of the previous sovereign, the general tone and manners of it were marked by a certain vulgarity which communicated itself to the drama of the time. In matters of literature, too, this Court went after false gods. Elevation and purity of taste were impossible to a king whose heart delighted in pedantry and mere display of learning.

Yet this must not blind us to the better side of James' influence. The scholarship of the Jacobean age was quite equal to that of Elizabeth's time. The King himself set the fashion and inspired his courtiers and dependents with a love of learning. Education manifested an increasing interest in matters of discovery, travel, history and classical antiquities.

Aikin: James I.

The sphere of feminine education also was enlarged. This wide-spread taste for learning made its way into the literature, and it was by reason of it that Jonson was able to hold such sway over courtiers and wits. It was inevitable, however, that so great a praise of learning should lead to mere literary affectation. The King's actual learning was only surpassed by his love of its display. In overwhelming theological discussions, and in the most unfamiliar erudition, he found abundant delight. Hence it happened that wit and affected conceits came to be held in high repute at Court. We have Jonson's authority that "now nothing is good that is natural. Right and natural language seems to have the least wit in it; that which is writhen and tortured is counted the more exquisite. ---Nothing is fashionable till it be deformed, and this is to write like a gentleman. All must be affected and preposterous as our gallants' clothes". James himself was a wit. It is his saying that "very wise men and very fools do little harm; it is the mediocrity of wisdom that troubleth all the world". Burlesque and caricature, puns and verbal quibbles, far-fetched conceits and speculative discourse, ever rejoiced his heart. It was only to be expected, then, that such things should be frequently used in contemporary literature.

The drama was patronised by James' pleasure-loving Court with a zeal which rivalled Elizabethan enthusiasm and much

money was expended on the production of masques. Cardinal Bentivoglio in a letter to the Court of Rome, says of Queen Anne, "Her great passion is for balls and entertainments which she herself arranges, and which serve as a public theatre on which to display her grace and beauty." During the greater part of the reign Ben Jonson was kept busy by his patrons who required his services for numerous Court festivals of a most gorgeous description. The drama proper, too, enjoyed a liberal share of favour at Court, and was often written with a direct appeal to Court taste. The work of Beaumont and Fletcher attained its great popularity owing to the fact that it was a faithful mirror of Jacobean society.

The accession of Charles I was a signal for the general improvement of the tone of Court life.<sup>1</sup> The young King early excited public interest by his marked attention to religion. The buffoons and many of the favourites, who had frequented his father's Court, were dismissed, and society assumed a more modest and seemly character. The Court was not transformed in a moment into a model of virtue; it was still possible for Lord Sutherland to write from the army to his wife, declaring that the language in the army was so bad that it made him fancy himself at Court, but certainly the courtiers showed a greater regard for decorum than in the

<sup>1</sup> Aikin: Charles I.



previous reign.

In matters of amusement, the new Court was more refined in its taste. All cruel sports were abolished except cock-fighting, and a special stigma was laid on duelling. Chivalry was by now quite dead, but its place was supplied by a whole-hearted and liberal patronage of letters and the fine arts. The Earl of Arundel, though no great scholar himself, gave a stimulus to Caroline literature. It was through his agency that the Alexandrine M.S. of the Old and New Testaments was transmitted to Charles I. The learning of this reign was as great as that of the previous one though of a different character. It was remarkable for bearing a closer relation to life. Feminine education shows a corresponding change. The ladies of Charles' Court were as learned as Elizabethan dames, though their knowledge consisted in matters of greater importance, from the point of view of general utility and culture.

The influence of Charles' queen, Henrietta Maria of France, is by no means to be overlooked. It was she, rather than her husband, who gave a stimulus to literary production, and it was only natural that her authority should be exerted in the direction of her native language. She had been brought up under the immediate influence of the Hotel de Rambouillet, and in closest sympathy with its aims.<sup>1</sup> It was in imitation, than, of French customs that 'salons' were introduced into English Court circles, and placed under Court

<sup>1</sup> Upham: French Influence in English Literature.

patronage. The chief coterie-leaders were the Duckesses of Carlisle and Newcastle and Mrs. Catherine Philips, the "matchless Orinda." It is significant that in England these 'salons' were confined to the Court, and not as in France extended to include bourgeois writers, who, in this country, had very little sympathy with what they had seen and heard of French literary fashions. The productions of these 'salons' were, not serious art, <sup>but mere diversions to</sup> ~~They occupied~~ the leisure hours of Court gallants, ~~and may be termed mere diversions.~~ They were characterised by wit, affectation, ingenious conceits, elegant expression, and their theme is Platonic love which James Howell described as love "abstracted from all corporeal gross Impressions and consisting in Contemplations and Ideas of the Mind." This did not, however, prevent the young gallant from addressing pretty verses to the supposed passionless object of his "Platonic" admiration. Besides these elegant love poems the salons produced a large number of 'vers de societe', sonnets, heroic poems, pastorals and dramas. Most of our English lyrists - Carew, Suckling, Cleveland, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and Waller - fell under their influence and endeavoured to write in the prescribed elegant style. It was the fashion for every courtier to try his hand at versifying, so that poetry became one of the chief interests of the Court. In prose the 'salons' busied themselves with letter-writing, under the influence of Balzac,

Theophile, de Vian, and Voiture, besides producing an immense quantity of tedious romances in the "Platonic" vein, in imitation of the works of d'Urfe, the Scudery and others.

That drama, too, enjoyed royal and courtly favour we have on the evidence of the Duchess of Newcastle, who, with her husband, loved and patronised literature. When King Charles was journeying to his coronation in Scotland, he made a stay with the Duke of Newcastle, who entertained him so agreeably that when the Queen went north he desired the Duke "to prepare the like entertainment for her as he had done formerly for him. Which my lord did" wrote the duchess "and endeavoured for it with all possible care and industry," and Ben Jonson was called in to prepare the royal entertainment.

In particular Queen Henrietta favoured pastoral drama in the pseudo-Platonic style of the French 'salons'. Until the outbreak of the Civil War, she and her ladies were continually preparing masques and pastoral plays in which no expense was spared. Among them we find Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess". So closely did she follow French fashions in these representations that French actresses were introduced to the great horror of the nation in general and of Prynne in particular.

During the period of the Commonwealth there was a partial breach in the course of Court influence. Cromwell

kept about him a modest Court of moral demeanour and sober dignity. Here he entertained the master-minds of his age, among whom were to be found Milton, Marvel, Waller, Hartlib. But we must look elsewhere for Court influence, which chiefly resided among the exiled members of Charles' Court - Crashaw, Cowley, Denham, D'Avenant - whose literary achievements were of necessity thrust for a time into the background. Nevertheless it was they who, by their dogged perseverance in face of all impediment, kept alive an interest in drama and in literature during the impropitious years of the Protectorate, and formed a link between the literary productions of the Courts of Charles I and Charles II.

With the Restoration, Court life sank to the lowest depths of degradation and vice.<sup>1</sup> There was no longer any attempt even at the appearance of respectability. Virtue was openly ridiculed at Court and in Court drama, while sin was shamelessly exhibited. This turn of affairs was due to a reaction against the unwelcome restraint which Cromwell had enforced upon the nation, though it was probably given direction by the "Platonism" of the last Stuart Court. It must, however, be borne in mind that the immorality of the Restoration prevailed only in Court circles; the rest of the nation led perfectly respectable lives and raised unheeded complaints against the condition of the Court.

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay: Essay on Leigh Hunt.

There was little genuine love of learning among the courtiers themselves. The King was fond of dabbling in science,<sup>1</sup> but beyond this the whole of Court life was given to the pursuit of pleasure. The courtiers realised that learning was a thing to be admired, though something which they did not care to acquire. In order, therefore, to gain a fame, at least, for learning, they were ever ready to extend patronage to those impecunious writers who honoured them with dedications. The conversation, however, at the Court of Charles II was brilliant and witty. The King himself could tell a story with skill and vivacity so that his courtiers never wearied of hearing the royal narrative repeated.<sup>2</sup> In fact the age soon gained a reputation for an advanced refinement in expression, which Dryden, in his "Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age", attributed to the King and the Court. "The wit of this age is much more courtly" he writes, than that of the previous age, because "there was less of gallantry than in ours." He then proceeds to enquire the cause of this refinement in conversation which communicated itself to all branches of Restoration literature, and was chiefly instrumental in instituting a new and clearer prose style. "I must freely, and without flattery, ascribe it to the Court, and in it, particularly to the King, whose example gives a law to it. His own misfortunes, and the nation's, afforded him an

<sup>1</sup> He was the first President of the Royal Society

<sup>2</sup> Gosse & Garnett: English Literature.

opportunity, which is rarely allowed to sovereign princes. I mean of travelling, and being conversant in the more polished Courts of Europe; and thereby of cultivating a spirit which was formed by nature to receive the impressions of a gallant and generous education. At his return he found a nation lost as much in barbarism as in rebellion; and, as the excellency of his nature forgave the one, so the excellency of his manners reformed the other. The desire of imitating so great a pattern first awakened the dull and heavy spirits of the English from their natural reservedness; loosened them from their stiff forms of conversation, and made them easy and pliant to each other in discourse. Thus, insensibly, our way of living became more free; and the fire of the English wit, which was before stifled under a constrained, melancholy way of breeding, began first to display its force by mixing the solidarity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours."

Not only in this, but in all branches of literature, Charles' sympathies were with the land where he had spent the greater part of his life. The French 'romans de longue haleine' had enjoyed for some time a prodigious popularity at Court. They were translated, imitated, and often used to supply plots for Restoration drama. Court gallants were so taken with the French fashions that they gave themselves the

air of educated gentlemen by flavouring their conversation with French expressions. The theatre, too, by Charles' special desire, was founded on French models. Preceding English drama was too vulgar for the refined taste of the Restoration, and could only be tolerated by being rewritten according to the prevailing ideas. "Heroic plays", in the style of Corneille, with plots taken from French romances, and comedy, after the fashion of Moliere's stage, were most palatable.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the drama in which the Court of Charles II delighted was a mere travesty of the great French chefs d'oeuvre. The fine sentiment of Corneille degenerated, with the English dramatists, into bombast, and the elegant language of French tragedy was supplanted by artificiality and affectation. The whole was varnished over with a coating of Restoration vice, in order to render it more attractive to the Courtly audience.

We have seen, then, that the relation existing between the Court and the literature of the 17th. century was very complex in nature. In some cases it was due to direct interference or suggestion on the part of the Courtiers, in others, to the transmission of taste, for whatever occupied the attention of these gentlemen was sure to find a place in the literature, which owed its being and maintenance to their interest. Besides this the fashions and foibles of society

<sup>1</sup> Orrery in a letter to a friend about his "Black Prince" (See also "Prince" page 136)

were reflected in contemporary literature, sometimes in approbation and acceptance of their customs, sometimes in criticism of them.

The last, and perhaps the most far-reaching form of influence, came through patronage, of which the chief example is seen in the Laureateship, virtually created by James I in 1617. It was really an extension of the office held by Chaucer, Spenser, etc. as poets belonging to the Court and maintained by royal pensions. Jonson was the first Poet Laureate by Royal Letters Patent, issued by warrant of Charles I in 1630. It reads "Know ye how that wee, for divers good considerations, us at this present especially moving, and in consideration of the good and acceptable service done unto us and our said father by the said Benjamin Johnson, and especially to encourage him to proceed in these services of his witt and pen, which we have enjoined unto him, and which we expect from him, are pleased to augment and increase the said annuitie." The office of the Poet Laureate was to produce appropriate poems on momentous occasions, and the pension was subject to such continued literary activity, for in 1631 it was temporarily taken from Jonson "until he shall have presented unto the Court some fruits of his labours." Jonson's successor in 1638 was Sir William D'Avenant, of whom Thomas May records that he had "the chief direction and



management of the Court diversions so long as the disorder of the time would permit." The dependence of this office upon the Court is seen from the fact that during the Commonwealth it fell into abeyance. After the Restoration, however, it was reinstated, for in 1670 the Laureateship was given to Dryden who was succeeded in 1688 by his enemy and rival Thomas Shadwell.

But apart from the Laureateship, all poetry was for a time more or less under Court patronage. In Elizabeth's reign the custom was at its height, for then the Court was, <sup>the centre of the fine arts</sup> & was pleased to manifest great concern in literary matters. In the succeeding reigns, however, it gradually died out as the people acquired more education, and the Court became farther and farther removed from the nation at large. That this came to pass is not a matter for lamentation, for patronage was no unmixed blessing in English literature. "All thro' the Elizabethan age, however, patronage was regarded as the one goal for the writer." <sup>1</sup> Lodge, in "A Fig for Morius" tells us

"The priest unpaide can neither singe nor say,  
Nor poets sweetlie write excepte they meete  
With sounde rewardes, for sermoning so sweete."

It was only natural, then, that a patron should expect a little flattery in return for his bounty. He must be bribed by the promise of an eternity of fame, or else must be praised as

<sup>1</sup> Sheavyn: The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age.

possessing abnormal virtues. His tastes, too, must be flattered and consulted even in preference to the poet's own inclinations. Francis Bacon solicits a theme from King James with the remark:- "I should with more alacrity embrace your Majesty's direction than my own choice", while the high-minded Massinger complains that his "low fortune" prevented his refusing "what by his patron he was called unto." Because sonnet-series were the fashion, a young poet could not give free rein to his inspiration and write what was suited to his genius, until he had first propitiated the courtly Muses by a copy of sonnets in the approved vein, with but scant regard for sincerity of feeling. Events of royal or courtly interest, too, were eagerly responded to. With a lively sense of favours to come, all poets, great and small, poured forth abundant panegyrics and congratulations, mingled with the most extravagant adulation.

Such a state of affairs cannot but move one to disgust. A poet is ready to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, to relinquish his individuality, to prostitute the genius, it may be, that <sup>N</sup>ature has given him, and to measure his verse by the reward likely to be meted out to him. "Divine Lady" says Nash to Mistress Elizabeth Carey "you I must and will memorize more especially, for you recompense learning extraordinarily." In addition to these evils it was

inevitable that such uninspired production, such a parade of versifying powers, should be accompanied by bombast, and by quaint, forced conceits. The total damage done to English literature by this custom is irreparable.

With this before us it seems that Court influence on literature must have been anything but beneficial, and on the whole, this judgement is correct. Court taste and good taste were not always the same thing, as may be instanced from the literary affectations to which courtly literature was prone. The most glaring example of this evil influence is seen in the writing of the Restoration. When Dryden was himself he could write the lines to Mrs. Anne Killigrew, the "Ode on St, Cecilia's Day" and "Alexander's Feast", but when he wrote for Court approbation he became as sordid as the other Restoration dramatists. He confessed that, in writing for the theatre, he was not following his natural bent. What might he not have done had he heeded the promptings of the genius within him?

Yet, in spite of regrets such as these, we cannot but admit that the Court was the foster-mother of the Muses. It was there, among "the company of courtly makers" that poetry had her birth, and there she was nourished and tended until she was able to stand in her own strength. We must bear in mind also that, without the liberal patronage of wealthy

courtiers, many a poor man, endowed with natural gifts, would have been forced to let them waste away through want of opportunity and encouragement for their display. It was the Court that gave stimulus to the Renaissance, unsealed for succeeding generations the literature of other nations, and of other ages, and breathed forth a quickening spirit over the dry bones of Medieval literature, giving life to some of England's finest literary possessions.

## THE COMPANY OF COURTLY MAKERS. II.

The date at which our period <sup>then</sup>~~begin~~ marks the beginning of a new and glorious era in English poetry. Since the death of Chaucer there had been but little poetry of value. Wyatt and Surrey, in the reign of Henry VIII, had rendered unestimable services to our versification by their untiring search after new metrical forms. Apart from foreign models their work was chiefly influenced by Chaucer with whom they became acquainted through The Versions of Pinson (1526) and Thynne (1533)<sup>1</sup>. As neither of these writers was quite at home with Chaucer's versification, it is not surprising that Wyatt and Surrey made **faulty** use of his metres. To the Elizabethans, therefore, their verse schemes were quite unintelligible, at least it would seem so from the way they were altered in Tottel's "Miscellany" as well as from the inability to explain Surrey's blank verse. It was fortunate for England that, at this time, a new mine of invaluable material was being opened up in the shape of foreign literatures, in the study of which the Queen and her Court lead the way.<sup>2</sup> Queen Elizabeth was eminently a woman of her age. Brought up as a child of the Renaissance, she lost no time, on her accession, in giving it impetus in England, and in becoming pioneer of a broader education. Henry VIII had taken care to have his children instructed in the new learning, but his

<sup>1</sup> Foxwell: Introduction to "Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt".

<sup>2</sup> Williams: The Influence of the Reformation on English Literature.

influence in this matter did not extend much beyond his own family and his closest intimates. During the next two reigns the times were overcast, and altogether unfavourable to the growth of the new interest that came from Italy. But with the fair hopes of Elizabeth's reign, there was an unparalleled opportunity for the development of the Renaissance in England. Elizabeth herself championed the cause with great enthusiasm; she encouraged her courtiers to follow her example; and by her untiring energy in its behalf, she brought the new learning into close contact with the people themselves, and lived to see a literary public which extended far beyond the narrow limits of the Court.<sup>1</sup>

The courtiers, as a circle of literary men and women, whose interests were centred in the Queen, were, of course, the first to receive this new influence, and they showed themselves eager to follow its guidance with all their powers, if only to flatter the tastes of their leader. As this new learning came from Italy, it was natural that the English Renaissance should direct its interest, after the manner of the Italian humanists, towards foreign literatures, and especially to the classics. We read that anyone at Elizabeth's Court who could not speak French and Italian was accounted an illiterate fellow, and no one was so utterly ignorant that he did not know Latin, and very often Greek too.<sup>2</sup> The Queen herself became the chief

<sup>1</sup> Sheavyn: The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age.

<sup>2</sup> Harrison: Description of England.

promoter of this new learning by her translation of Boethius and Sallust.<sup>1</sup> The courtiers were not slow to follow her example, and it is important to bear in mind that all they wrote was intended purely for Court perusal. As a consequence of this courtly effort there appeared prolific translations of everything the courtiers could lay their hands on, whether from Greek, Latin, Italian or French literature.<sup>2</sup> In 1581, Arthur Hall M.P. translated ten books of the "Iliad" from French, while in 1598, Chapman published seven books of his famous "Homer". By 1591, Sir John Harrington had finished his version of Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso", undertaken by royal command, and Tasso's "Gerusalemme Liberata" found a translator in Carew (1594) as well as in Edward Fairfax, whose translation (1600) we learn was a favourite of James I and provided solace to Charles I during his imprisonment. A complete enumeration of Elizabethan translations would be tedious, but this short list serves to indicate the direction in which court influence tended, as well as to foretell the lines upon which subsequent literature was to proceed, since it could derive but little help from English precedent.

The benefit that the Court conferred upon our literature by opening up this new sphere of interest, is inestimable.

<sup>1</sup> Ascham: Letters.

<sup>2</sup> Tucker: Foreign Influence in English Literature.

Without some sure guide on which they might rely with safety, the Elizabethan poets would have been left groping about in ~~helpless~~<sup>hopeless</sup> darkness, while their splendid powers wasted away. But the rich stores of material that came to these benighted poets from foreign literatures afforded an example in composition, besides providing them with the wherewithal to carry on their work, both in the matter and the form of English poetry.<sup>1</sup> The sense of security with which they relied upon the guidance of other languages is well illustrated from the Areopagus, of which first mention is made in the Harvey - Spenser correspondence of 1579 - 80. Through a mistrust of all existing English metres the members of this club sought to establish a new and better scheme of versification by a close imitation of classical metres.<sup>2</sup> Though their efforts proved to be misguided, the truer instincts of the real poets among them directed their attention towards French metres, from which they derived great help and assurance. Following the experiments of their brethren across the Channel, Spenser, Sidney and a host of admiring followers, borrowed metrical hints from Ronsard and the Pleiade; especially were they indebted to them for the arrangement of the sonnet.

But though the courtly translators helped to set up

<sup>1</sup> Churton Collins: Greek Influence in English Literature.

<sup>2</sup> Upham: French Influence on English Literature.



a scheme of versification worthy of their great nation and of the noble language which it was straining every nerve to establish, it is on the subject-matter, even more than on the form of the poetry, that they have made the most lasting effect. Often whole themes of poems derived their suggestion from foreign works, as, for example, Spenser's "Faerie Queene" which was undertaken in emulation of "Orlando Furioso", or Marlowe's "Hero and Leander". Even Shakespeare did not disdain to borrow from the translators, as his debt to Plutarch and the Italian novelists testifies. Minor themes, too, are of foreign origin; Tasso supplied the idea of a moral intention for the "Faerie Queene" and Plato's theories of Friendship and Beauty have left indelible impressions on a good deal of the work of the Elizabethans. Perhaps the most remarkable example of this borrowing is to be found in the 'rare' Ben Jonson, who is eminently representative of his time, and whose work was calculated to suit the taste of the Court, and so far fulfilled its aim as to obtain for him royal commendation and a pension.

The influence of Elizabethan translation penetrated every branch of poetry, and continued to make itself felt even during the reign of the succeeding monarch. With the marriage of Charles I foreign influence of another kind, though still

emanating from court circles, crept into our literature.<sup>1</sup>

It became manifest in the pastoral poetry and the 'vers de societe' in which English courtiers imitated French literary fashions. This influence even the calamities of the reign were unable to suppress, and with the accession of Charles II French literature continued, with increased force, to assert its authority over the imagination of English writers.

The first group of poetry with which we have to deal is the lyric. Until the Elizabethan age there had been little lyric verse, as we understand the term, with the exception of a few tentative poems by Wyatt and Surrey. Then there ensued a long period of silence until, suddenly, the nation having come to a consciousness of its powers under the ministering care of Elizabeth, and to a sense of security which arose from her almost providential guidance, burst forth into song, the most charming melodious song the world has ever heard. At first poetry was almost exclusively in the hands of "the company of courtly makers". Grave men of action, frivolous Court gallants, all tried their hand at versifying, for according to the new ideals which Castiglione taught, the power of writing verse was regarded as an indispensable attribute of a courtier.<sup>2</sup> For the most part their compositions were only short, canco-like poems, but they

<sup>1</sup> Upham: French Influence in English Literature.

<sup>2</sup> Einstein: Italian Influence in English Literature.

throb with the vitality, the gaiety, the brilliance, which emanated from the Court, and soon infected the whole of the nation. They are, as a rule, tersely and elegantly expressed; abounding in wit and quaint conceits, so dear to the heart of every Elizabethan courtier; and reflecting, in their general polish and balance of sentence, the new dialect with which Lyly had gratified the wishes of the Court for a refined diction which should be distinct from that used by the common people. To appreciate the difference between these lyrics and those calculated to suit popular taste, we have only to read some of Ben Jonson's songs and compare them with those unpolished creations in "Gammer Gurton's Needle".

Quite a large proportion of this lyric poetry is to be found as interludes in plays or masques. The latter of these being written almost exclusively for the entertainment of the nobility bear evidence to courtly fondness for this form of verse. Perhaps this taste may be due to the fact that Elizabethan drama was often represented by the Children of the Royal Chapel or of Paul's, who belonged to the Queen's household. These boys were trained choristers, and songs were introduced into the plays for the purpose of exhibiting their vocal powers.<sup>1</sup> Thus it became the fashion for Court

<sup>1</sup> Schelling: English Drama.

drama to be interspersed with short poems, and finally the custom extended to all who "trafficked with the stage". Lyly's comedies, written expressly for court performance, are garnished with the songs of a true-born lyric poet. His earliest play, "Alexander & Campaspe" (1584) would be worth the remembering if only for its "Cupid & Campaspe", a lyric of fairy lightness and graceful fancy, such as would be sure to please the refined and experienced tastes of its courtly audience. "Cupid Arraigned" from "Galathea" (1592) treats with the frolics and cruelties of the wicked god, in that light and elegant vein of which the Elizabethans were masters. "The Urchins' Dance" from the "Maid's Metamorphosis" (1600) manifests a delicate and sprightly fancy which would have done justice to the "divine" Shakespeare.

By the moon we sport and play,  
With the night begins our day;  
As we frisk the dew doth fall;  
Trip it, little urchins all.  
Lightly as the little bee,  
Two by two, and three by three.  
And about go we, and about go we.

But it is useless to attempt an enumeration of all the dainty verses of Elizabethan courtiers, yet "the rich clusters of golden verse hang so temptingly that it is hard to cease

plucking when once you have begun. Sidney, Dyer, Essex, Raleigh, Oxford, all wrote fashionable poems in the elegant style which savours of the prevailing Euphuism. The treatment is usually light and gay, in accordance with the unwillingness of the courtier to deal with matters of too serious a nature. Even when the theme is disappointed love or a stern mistress, the courtier is never so distracted with grief that he cannot light upon some remote conceit, or polished phrase in which to make complaint. Even when he is face to face with death, Raleigh can joke in the grimmest way as he prays for divine mercy on his soul.

"... since my flesh must die so soon  
And want a head to dine at noon".

In spite of the fact that the sentiments are usually so superficial, we cannot but feel ourselves bewitched by the gracefulness of the thought and its expression, as well as by the exquisite melody of the verse. Where there ever such musicians as the Elizabethans in whose days "music was married to immortal verse"? It was because the Court showed a great interest in music that many of the poets wrote their verses with the idea of having them set to an accompaniment. And this is the very reason that the poetry of this age is so extraordinarily melodious. One of the most remarkable of

*Allen's Preface to Elizabethan Lyrics.*

these poet-musicians was Thomas Campion (1540 - 1619), a writer of Court masques. His poems are in the fashionable Euphuistic vein, with balance of structure and concise phrasing, but that which strikes us most about them is their delicate fancy and exquisite melody, which corresponds perfectly with the general spirit of the poem. In "Sweet Master Campion" above all others, "Music and sweet poetry agree".

The King of lyric poetry, with the exception perhaps of our "Sweetest" Shakespeare, was Ben Jonson, the greater part of whose verse is to be found interspersed among his masques. Although, as we have seen, he borrowed from other literatures to an enormous extent, yet he possessed that remarkable facility of expression, which belonged to the Elizabethan age. He was master of that terse, epigrammatic style, which characterised every courtly writer. In addition to this he shows the fashionable influence of Euphuism in the balance of his sentences, and the elegance of his language. He clothes the substance of others' poems in a distinctly Elizabethan garb, so that their whole appearance is changed, and we laud them as original compositions. In fact it has been left to the lot of quite recent scholarship to discover that Jonson's short poems are mere borrowed

jewels enriched, whose beauty has been enhanced by the most exquisite Elizabethan setting.

The poems of Sir Henry Wotton (1563 - 1639) whose work was published posthumously by Izaak Walton in 1651 under the title of "Reliquiae Wottonianae" are of interest as marking a transition between the courtly poetry of Elizabeth's reign and that of the early Stuarts. At first he follows the Euphuistic poets of the Queen's reign, as for example, in "O thou great Power, in whom I move", but his later poems reflect the change of taste which came with the Stuarts. The quest for terseness, and the love of remote resemblances are sometimes urged to obscurity, ~~as~~ <sup>be seen from the character of the "happy life"</sup> in accordance with the taste set by James and his Court, ~~as~~ <sup>as Jon</sup> Jonson had joined in the worship of these Jacobean idols, but he had also preserved a sense of the relation between thought and expression. It was men of lesser genius, the courtiers, who were ever paying tribute to elegance, or men like Donne - at his worst - with their diligent search after witty similes drawn from nature, who came to grief when they tried to walk in the footsteps of a born poet like Jonson.

During the reign of Charles I, the Court continued to be the true home of the lyric. Here the pastoral fancies

and gallant adventures of Cavalier poets were promptly set to music by composers in the royal service, and sung before the monarch at Whitehall. The Queen, too, with her natural love of gaiety and pleasure, gave a stimulus to the literature of the period. As members of English 'salons', carried on in imitation of the Hotel de Rambouillet, her courtiers poured forth hundreds of "petits vers galants" in honour of fair Chloris, Daphne or Amaryllis, in accordance with the Court taste for pastorals, set by the Queen herself. These writers are not remarkable for originality of subject; their usual themes are the joys and griefs of love, and the meretriciousness of outward beauty. They call to their aid the somewhat trite and limited similitudes of flowers and lace of "ivory, coral, gold". Neither are they possessed by a devastating intensity of passion. They revel in their griefs as in their joys; they are anxious to die at the slightest frown from their mistress, though a timely smile from her proud eyes immediately restores their drooping hearts to the highest exaltation of hope.

"Dear love, let me this evening die,  
O smile not to prevent it"

Cambridge History of Literature.



Yet the chief merit of these lyrical effusions lies in the consummate charm with which the courtly poet-lovers knew how to despair and languish. They showed a devotion to elegance in all they did as in all they said. The gallant gentlemen of the Court always acted, felt and spoke, in the most becoming manner. Sons of Ben and true-born lyrists, they aimed at epigrammatic terseness, though at times they became obscure, owing to the quaintness of their conceits. Yet they wrote with admirable ease and elegance, and all their work breathes forth the refined atmosphere of the Court. It is useless to speculate to what a state of perfection and elegance these gallants might have brought our English poetry had they been allowed to pursue their process of polishing and refining without interruption.

Thomas Carew ( 1598 c - 1638) was virtually Poet-Laureate of the Court of Charles I. He gave himself up unreservedly to the frivolity of Court life, and his works were a true reflection of the gaiety and superficiality among which he was content<sup>ed</sup> to dwell. He was the father of the whole family of gallant gentlemen, a little the worse for wine, who chirruped und<sup>er</sup> Celia's window to the very close of the century. He wrote with the utmost elegance and grace. He could express fine fancies in the daintiest and

most melodious verse, and knew how to pay compliments in a manner that could not fail to please. Yet he marred his work by indulgence in the worst of conceits, and even joined the company of those who took for their theme such subjects as "A Fly that Flew into my Mistress her Eye". The emotions to which he gave vent were always superficial. He never forgot his good-breeding so far as to indulge in an unseemly intensity of feeling. One moment he praises "Celia Singing" and lauds in felicitous strains his lady's "Lips and Eyes", the next he declaims against her "rebel sex" and strips her of all her charm in a most heartless manner.

"Know, Celia, since thou art so proud,  
'Twas I that gave thee thy renown;  
Thou hadst in the forgotten crowd  
Of common beauties, lived unknown,  
Had not my verse exhaled thy name,  
And with it impt the wings of Fame,"

Nevertheless the accomplishments of one who could write the poems beginning

"Ask me no more where Jove bestows  
When June is past, the fading rose;"

and

"No more shall meads bedeck'd with flowers  
Nor sweetness dwell in rosy bowers;"

cannot be belittled. Though depth of <sup>emotion</sup>~~feeling~~ may be lacking, there is behind these verses a poet's feeling for graceful fancies and melodious phrases, and a courtier's taste for elegance, both of thought and expression.

Perhaps the most representative of this group of Cavalier poets is Sir John Suckling (1609 - 1641) whose works were published posthumously in 1646 under the title of "Fragmenta Aurea". All the gaiety and lightheartedness of court life finds expression in his verse. He was a noted wit at the Court and his remarkable versatility and humour has endued his poetry with that irresistible charm. The deeper and more serious side of his nature, which could surrender everything for his King, never asserts itself in his writings. With the superficiality of the other Cavalier poets, and a touch of cynicism which seems to betoken the decay of chivalry at Court, he can write

"Out upon it I have loved

Three whole days together,

And am like to love three more,

If it prove fair weather"

It is his "debonair gaiety of heart" that gives him so much charm. The "Ballad upon a Wedding" is a triumph of combined good humour and delicate expression. It is essentially the

work of a courtier and a wit, and in its melody and graceful phrase shows the high level to which these elegant triflers were able to attain.

In Richard Lovelace (1618 - 1658) whose poetry, "Lucasta", was published in 1649, we have another martyr in the Cavalier cause. Several of his poems were written while he was suffering imprisonment for the cause of King Charles. His fame rests on three or four short lyrics. The remainder of his works are either written on the trifling themes of those who love

"To sport with Anaryllis in the shade,

Or with the tangles of Heaera's hair".

or else they are disfigured by absurd conceits. But the poems "To Althea from Prison", "To Lucasta on going beyond the Seas" and "To Lucasta on going to the Wars" are perfect in poetic fancy and expression. They reach the high-water mark of Cavalier verse, and have this advantage above the rest of their kind, that they contain something of sincerity of feeling and nobility of thought.

Robert Herrick (1591 - 1674) was not praising himself unduly when he wrote -

"Before I went  
To banishment  
Into the loathed West,  
I could rehearse  
A lyric verse,  
And speak it with the best".

He was, indeed, the greatest of the Cavalier poets, and most of his work, even that produced in the "loathed West", was reminiscent of the gay city life he had led, in the shadow of Whitehall.<sup>1</sup> While he was still in London he spent part of his time in writing courtly verses for festive occasions. In 1620 he was received at Court, where he seems to have met with some success, for his verses were "set by Mr. Ro. Ramsey" and "Mr. Nic Lanier", two great musicians, who moved in the highest society at Court. In 1629 he was 'banished' to "dull Devonshire" but was unable to overcome his love for the convivial society of the Court. In a few months he was writing a pastoral which was "presented to the King" and "set by Mr. Nic Lanier" on the occasion of the birth of the future Charles II, to whom as his "Works' Creator" he later addresses his "Hesperides". All his poems bear signs of Court influence in their polish and refinement. Moreover, the spirit of joy in life, of present

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge History of Literature

mirth without a thought of future sorrow, is expressive of the gaiety which prevailed among the city gallants. His pen is ever ready with pretty compliments for the many dainty mistresses who peopled his imagination. The spirit, the elegance, and the lyrical lilt of the Cavalier poets, are most abundantly present in the poetry of this country parson, whose work is the climax of the refining process of these lyrists.

At the Court of Charles II the demand was more than ever for elegance of outward form, no matter how trivial or conventional the thought set forth. The witty and polished conversation of the King and his courtiers,<sup>1</sup> together with the efforts of the Royal Society,<sup>2</sup> stimulated a taste for simplicity, clearness, and felicity of expression. In addition to this the courtly approbation extended to the works of French prose-writers, especially Montaigne, whose essays were translated by one of the Restoration courtiers, Charles Cotten, in 1665, helped to establish a simple and direct prose style. The life of the Court during this period was exceedingly artificial; the vitality and exuberance of the Elizabethans was now quite dead, and the age of Reason was fast approaching. The Court had little but its outward splendour and gallantry to recommend it; the

<sup>1</sup> Dryden: Defence of the Epilogue on the Conquest of Granada

<sup>2</sup> Articles of the Royal Society.

life there was hollow, insincere and frivolous. It was to such a patron that the greatest writers bowed the knee. All individuality was sunk in the mad rush to gratify Court taste.<sup>1</sup> Where so little depth of thought and sincerity of feeling were to be found, fine phrases were needed for the purpose of hiding grave defects. No longer could there be any fear of obscurity arising from too great a burden of meaning.

Hence it was that the Restoration poets were remarkable for the smoothness and flexibility of their verse. Among these Edmund Waller (1606 - 1687) the reigning wit at the Court of Charles II, led the way. Early in life he began his career as courtier by writing graceful occasional verses in celebration of interesting events at Court. These he undertook in rhymed couplet of ten syllables, a metre little used hitherto, but in the hands of so fine a courtier and so apt a versifier, this obscure form acquired great flexibility and ease, and finally became so popular among the courtiers, being eminently suited for the expression of their slender thoughts and shallow feelings, that every trifler tried his hand at it. Butler rewrote some of his most characteristic pieces in the new metre; Mulgrave used it for his "Essay on Poetry" and Roscommon for his verse pamphlets.

It is only to be expected, then, that the lyric verse of the Restoration should be characterised by elegance of

<sup>1</sup> Beljame: Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siecle

outward form. And this is indeed the case. Waller's lyrics are clear in expression, and of that polished style, so dear to the courtier of no matter what period. His metrical effects are superb. The small inheritance of vitality and sincere emotion, which descended from the Elizabethans to the Cavalier poets, had by this time quite spent itself. We sigh in vain for the abandonment of the Elizabethans. The poems "Her Girdle" and "Go, lovely Rose" are perfect in their way. They commend themselves to us by their delicate fancies, their felicitous phrases, their clever similitudes, but the pulse never quickens with genuine passion. The poet never oversteps the bounds of good-breeding so far as to allow himself to be carried away by his feelings. Would that he had sometimes sacrificed the courtier's elegance for a little human feeling. In the "Sacharissa" poems he seems to be ever conscious of himself and of his distinguished audience, who loved to listen to him. In fact we feel that had he not known the eyes of so many persons to be upon him, he would never have taken the pains to indite such pretty verses. For the Court he wrote and in the excellent technique of his verse he merited their praise.

Quite the reverse of the studied respectability of

/ Gosse: From Shakespeare to Pope.



Waller, is the roystering spirit of the Restoration lyrists. They are the descendants of Carew, loose-livers of the Court whom Milton arraigns as "Sons of Belial."

"In courts and palaces he also reigns,  
And in luxurious cities, where the noise  
Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,  
And injury and outrage, and when Night  
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the Sons  
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine."

Nevertheless, to them was given the divine fire of poesy, of which Waller was in sorry need. They possessed a truer lyric utterance than had been known since the Elizabethans, with whom they shared a keen sensibility to feminine beauty though not lacking the artistic perfection of Waller. Their inspiration, however short-lived, was pure and exquisite, the essence of poetry, and it is a thousand pities that they soiled the robe of their Muse in the mire of courtly vice.

Rochester (1648 - 1680) has given us the nearest approach to real feeling in his charming lyrics. The greatest scapegrace of Charles II's Court, he was at the same time one of its finest poets. According to Evelyn, he was "a very profound wit", and the Court provided an

atmosphere entirely congenial to the development and expression of his varied talents. His inspiration, though not long in flight, nevertheless soared to great heights, while in harmonious expression he can equal the elegance of Waller.

"I cannot change, as others do,  
Though you unjustly scorn;  
Since that poor swain that sighs for you,  
For you alone was born.  
No, Phillis, no, your heart to move  
A surer way I'll try;  
And to revenge my slighted love,  
Will still love on, will still love on, and die."

Other wits of King Charles' Court tried their hand at lyric verse, though none of their work can vie with the few perfect careless songs of Rochester. Sir Charles Sedley (1637 - 1701) and the Earl of Dorset (1637 - 1706) both wrote with the graceful gaiety and elegance of seasoned courtiers. Sedley is remembered solely for the lines -

"Love still hath something of the sea  
From whence his mother rose;"

while Dorset is famous for half a dozen lyrics of which two are eminently typical of a Court where common-sense was beginning to hold sway, even at the expense of chivalry;

for in two poems "On the Countess of Dorchester", the poet does not hesitate to ask of "Dorinda"

. "Canst thou forget thy age, thy locks,  
Can all that shines on shells and rocks  
Make thee a fine young thing?"

In a third poem, "To all you ladies now on land", purporting, though falsely, to have been written at sea, the elegant verse is ill able to disguise the superficiality of the thought. This Court verse, if only for the very ideals that inspired it, could never reach the greatest heights. It possessed outward beauty, but the conventionality of the underlying thought must inevitably have produced a corresponding decline in poetic achievement. We have only to measure the distance between the sonorous verse of Milton, with its serious purpose, and the light elegant fancies of the Restoration lyrists, in order to realise what literature lost by divorcing itself from the broader interests of the nation.

Closely allied with the courtly taste for lyric verse is the vogue of the sonnet, which reached its climax with the Elizabethans. Their first attempts ~~inw~~ this direction - within the range of our period - came from the pen of the youthful Spenser, whose earliest poetic effusions took the

form of translations of the sonnets of Du Bellay, which he called "Visions of Du Bellay." These he revised and enlarged under the title of "Antiquities of Rome." These were followed in 1584 by Watson's "Heka tompathia or Passionate Centurie of Love" which included poems of more than fourteen lines, though they were still called 'sonnets'.

With the circulation of Sidney's "Astrophel & Stella" (1591) the popularity of this form was ensured. His example stimulated emulation. Every poet who hoped to make a name for himself, began his career by writing sonnets. It seemed almost necessary for him to propitiate the Muses with a copy of sonnets before they could be expected to grant success to his future literary efforts. Hence it came to pass that every Court versifier paid florid tributes to a "Laura", and it happened too frequently that she was either a phantom-being, or some distant beauty, perhaps a patroness, for whom the pretender to fame had no real feeling, but who provided him, nevertheless, with an excuse for parading his poetical skill before the public eye. The inevitable result was a crowd of often worthless verses, treating of trite themes in conventional terminology, and with a great display of most absurd conceits.<sup>1</sup> Scarcely any one of them could depend on his own invention to provide him with original ideas, but they all preferred to pillage the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Sidney Lee: English Sonnets.


brains of other writers. Consequently there came into being innumerable sonnet-series whose most remarkable feature is their utter inanity. Even Shakespeare yielded to this fashion, although it is almost needless to add that his work is far and away above the other series.

In 1591 Daniel, the experienced courtier, produced his "Delia" sonnets in honour of his patroness, Mary Countess of Pembroke; in 1591 Constable's "Diana" appeared; Drayton repaid his benefactress, the Countess of Bedford, in his "Idea" of 1594; and so we might go on endlessly enumerating groups of stereotyped verses which differ from one another in only the most trivial respects. It is a relief to meet with Spenser's "Amoretti" (1595) and to know that here the writer was honouring an actual being for whom he had a real devotion. These sonnets are even of some autobiographical value. Certain of the themes may be a little conventional - no Elizabethan poet could refuse to immortalise his lady by honouring her in his verse - but, on the other hand, there are here poems of great beauty, throbbing with intense emotion. We feel that the pain of temporary disappointment was among the writer's most true experiences.

The energy with which the sonnet-vogue swept through the ranks of Elizabethan poets, soon exhausted itself. With

the years of declining chivalry, the custom fell into partial disuse and even ridicule. The "Gulling Sonnets" of Sir John Davies, written when the fashion of inditing sonnets was at its lowest ebb, probably helped to bring people to a real sense of the utter foolishness of the things they were accustomed to applaud. The following example parodying the French sonnet 'en echo' will serve to give an illustration of the extreme absurdity to which the sonneteers descended,

"What eagle can behold her sunbright eye,  
Her sunbrighte eye, yet lights the world with love,  
The world of Love wherein I live and die,  
I live and die and divers changes prove,  
I changes prove, yet still the same am I.  
The same am I, and never will remove,  
Never remove until my soul doth fly,  
My soul doth fly, and I surcease to move,  
I cease to move which now am moved by you,  
Am mov'd by you yet move mortall hearts,  
All mortal hearts whose eyes your eyes doth view,  
Your eyes doth view whence Cupid shoots his darts,  
When Cupid shoots his darts and woundeth those  
That honour you and never were his foes."



The pastoral poetry of Elizabeth's reign is of two kinds - that belonging to the people and that produced by the

Court. It was the former that first made its appearance in our literature, though the earliest successful efforts in pastoral poetry are due to the Court poets. The Court became the home of the pastoral,<sup>1</sup> for it was there that this new fruit of foreign translation found the most nourishment. Moreover the new ideals of Court life, so far removed from the simple rustic existence, challenged a comparison between Court and country. Wyatt's "Town and Country Mouse" marks its first use at Court, but with the artificial atmosphere of the new and splendid society of Elizabeth's reign, it received a fresh impulse. We have abundant evidence of Sidney's dislike for courtly activities,<sup>2</sup> and the "Arcadia" represents his occupation during temporary banishment from Court. To be with the gallant ~~Sh~~pherds and pretty Shepherdesses in woodland places, was his great delight. For him, as he tells us in a poem "In Dispraise of the Court" -

"Greater was the shepherd's treasure,

Than this false, fine, courtly pleasure."

And in this he was at one with his great friend, Edmund Spenser, who went to Court, his heart throbbing with the highest anticipations, as he tells us in "Colin Clout's Come Home Again." But it was with a sigh of relief that he

<sup>1</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry.

<sup>2</sup> Lang<sup>ue</sup>et Correspondence.

returned to the "green alders by the Mulla's shore." His golden dreams were dispersed when he

"Some part of those enormities did see,  
The which in Court continually hooved,  
And followed those which happie seemd to bee."

Colin sadly warns the listening and admiring swains that this kind of existence where "each man's worth is measured by his weed"

"is no sort of life  
For shepherd fit to lead in that same place  
Where each one seeks with malice and with strife  
To thrust downe other into foule disgrace,  
Himself to raise."

The "Faerie Queene" Book VI too, is interestingly reminiscent of the attitude of both Spenser and Sidney to the life with nature, as contrasted with the artificial pleasures of a Court. Old Melibee (Sir Francis Walsingham, Sidney's father-in-law) had once enjoyed the simple life, but disdainning his humble lot, he had for "ten years in prince's garden wrought." Cloyed at last with the "vainnesse" he found there, and deluded by idle hopes, he returned gladly to his lowly state.

"I from henceforth learned to love more deare  
This lowly, quiet life which I inherite here."



And this was the life to which Sir Calidore (Sir Philip Sidney) turned in seeking a respite from the quest of the Blatant Beast of Court slander.

And so every Elizabethan courtier came to be in love with idyllic rusticity, and contrasted the joy and peace of country swains with the artificial existence of the courtier. At the beginning of James's reign, when Court life fell into decay and disrepute, a further stimulus was given to the "Court versus country" controversy, for it was with most just complaints that poets could inveigh against the evils of a Court.

The last word on the subject has been said by Shakespeare in "As You Like It" in which the contrast between the courtly and the national pastoral is presented before us. A favourite at Court, the pastoral was considered worthy only of courtly diction, the fine phrases and high-flown conceits of courtiers. And these were, incongruously enough, put into the mouths of "silly" swains and shepherdesses. Shakespeare had a keen eye to the absurdity of the situation when he drew Phebe and Silvius. It needed the shrewd wit of a Touchstone to act as a corrective to this pastoral conventionality, which was almost entirely confined to the Court.

The first pastoral worthy of note was Spenser's "Shepherd's Calendar entitled to the Noble and Vertuous

Gentleman most worthy of all titles, both of learning and chevalrie, Mr. Philip Sidney." It is clearly a child of the time in its debt to such various originals as Theocritus, Vergil, the Italian Humanists, and Clement Marot. But though the poet has made every attempt to reduce his language to the peasant dialect, there are many remote allusions on which "E.K." thought it necessary to enlighten the reader, not to mention the fact that the shepherd's discourse on subjects far too ambitious for rustic intellects. Moreover, the poem indicates the use to which the pastoral was to be put. The most notable passages of the poem are dedicated to the immortal memory of fair Eliza. There is no doubting to which kind of pastoral these belong. They bear the signs of elegance, refinement, together with poetical skill and delicate fancy of a courtly composer.

With the success of Sidney's "Arcadia" the pastoral extended its bounds to include love poetry as well as complimentary verse. The love pastoral enjoyed an enormous popularity at Court, where most of the 'courtly makers' who had already manifested their skill in lyric verse, now made trial of pastoral strains. Sidney, Greville, Essex, Dyer, Oxford, Lyly, Raleigh, to say nothing of the novelists who wrote in the style of the "Arcadia", all indited pretty lyric verses in honour of some fair shepherdess. In beauty of

conception, in tender fancy and harmonious verse, their work possesses the varied charms of the best Elizabethan lyrics. As a vehicle of Court flattery, too, in epitaphs and in panegyric verses the pastoral acquired much elegance. Essex and Raleigh praised their Queen under the guise of shepherd lovers, while Spenser's favourite instrument of mourning was the oaten reed. It was when hangers-on at Court, men like Daniel and Drayton, whose position depended on patronage, imitated the manner of this courtly company without possessing the purity of its inspiration, that the pastoral degenerated into dull conventionality. The freshness of the simple life, which had attracted the first pastoralists by contrast with the existing conditions at Court, was soon superseded by the very artificiality from which the earlier poets had desired, in some measure, to escape. The hopes of preferment of such poets as these, depended upon the degree of satisfaction they could afford the great.<sup>1</sup> It was precisely this servile manner of following Court taste that wrought such ravages in our literature. Who can admire the lengthy shepherd strains "in praise of fairest Beta" when all sincere feeling is banished in favour of conventionalities?

<sup>1</sup> Sheavyn: The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age. c.f. also Shakespeare's England, Chapter XXII, Authors & Patrons by D. Nichol Smith.

"The early poems of Spenser were moves in the difficult game of preferment. They helped him to win the private-secretaryship of Lord Grey de Wilton, which made Ireland his home for the rest of his life. When in 1589 he returned to London with the first three books of the "Faerie Queene" he hoped that they would carry him to high office, and in 1596, when he issued the next three books, he still looked to the poem for his advancement." 56

So much for the Elizabethan pastoral which was fostered in an unhealthy atmosphere, though not without some breath of freshness to stimulate its growth, and which died a natural death amid the conventionalities of the Jacobean age. The pastoralism that revived under Charles I was of quite a different origin. Except for the rustic names given by the Cavalier lyrists to their ladies, it only flourished in the drama, which had its birth in France and was fostered by the favour of Queen Henrietta Maria.

Satire at Court arose from a sense of the disparity between the actual life of the Court and the ideals formed by thinking beings of what it ought to be. We have seen that in many cases this was expressed in pastoralism, but it also generated a satirical spirit which found ample food for its nourishment in the fashions and foibles of Court society. Sidney confined himself to pastoralism alone, but Spenser made use of both. His "Mother Hubbard's Tale" not only sets forth in vivid colours the misery of the "sooter's state" but also throws some light on Court incidents. It is a piece of splendid satire on the avarice and self-seeking motives of men in Court circles, and it bitterly deplores the false standards by which things are judged.

"And yet full few which follow them I see  
For virtue's bare regard advanced be,  
But either for some gainful benefit,  
Or that they may for their own turns be fit."

In contrast with this lamentable state, Spenser gives us the famous account of "the brave courtier", understood to be designed for Sir Philip Sidney. But alas, such a one was rare at Court. Spenser knew from bitter experience that to live at Court was

"To lose good days, that might be better spent;

To waste long nights in pensive discontent."

Drayton's fable of the "Owl" (1604) describing the disrepute in which poetry was held at Court, is very similar to Spenser's poem in its attack upon Court life, and seems to have been written in direct imitation of "Mother Hubbard's Tale."

In 1597, Joseph Hall published his "Virgidemiarum" containing satires in six books. The first book, of nine satires, was aimed at the fashionable scribblers of the day, and inveighed against the abuses of poetical composition. From the first satire we learn what forms of verse were in favour at the time.

"Nor ladie's wanton love, nor wandring knight,  
Legend I out in rhymes all richly dight,  
Nor fright the reader with the pagan vaunt  
Of mighty Mohound, and great Termagaunt,  
Nor list I sonnet to my mistress' face,  
To paint some Blowesse with a borrowed grace."

In a later satire he mentions other poetic fashions.

"Too popular is tragic poesie,  
Straining his tip-toes for a farthing fee,  
And doth besides on rhymeless numbers tread,  
Unbid iambics flow from careless head.  
Some braver brain in high heroic rhymes  
Compileth worn-out stories of old times"

With the sonneteer he is particularly out of patience,

"As though the staring world hang'd on his sleeve,  
When once he smiles, to laugh, and when he sighs to  
grieve."

He ridicules, too, the feeble verses of idle courtiers, who waste their leisure in extolling their mistress' monkey, or parrot, and laments the fact that the pastoral claims so great a share of the rising poet's attentions.

"But ere his Muse her weapon learn to wield,  
Or dance a sober pirrhicke in the field; -  
The sheep-cote first hath been her nursery,  
Where she hath worne her idle infancy;  
And in high startups walk'd the pastur'd plaines  
To tend her tasked herd that there remains."

The efforts exerted by the Areopagus in favour of classic metres are rewarded with the ridicule they deserve.

"Whoever saw a colt wanton and wild,  
Yok'd with a slow-foot ox on fallow field,  
Can right areed how handsomely besets  
Dull spondees with the English dactylets."

After attacking with great energy the long catalogue of courtly literary fashions, he proceeds to make assault upon the luxury of Elizabethan Court life, the absurdity of their tastes in matters of dress, as well as upon the frivolous and aimless existence of Court gallants. Marston brings much the same charges. In his volume of satires published in 1598, he inveighs, among other things, against the foppery of the courtier, who spent one half of his day in adorning himself and the other half in sighing "some sonnet out to his fair love." Marston pokes fun at the bombastic style of the Court, with its abundance of learned allusions, and shows, according to his own words, a "rugged contempt for harmony", for the smoothness and affected refinement of Court writers by using the coarsest terms and the harshest versification.

In Charles I's reign there was little Court satire, owing to the all-important political conflict that was absorbing men's attention. During the Commonwealth, Milton found opportunity to express his hatred of Kings and their followers. Several passages in "Paradise Lost" speak with contempt of royal pomp and splendour, while "Comus" and "Lycidas" rail against the depravity and frivolity of Court tastes. The central motive of "Samson Agonistes" is an unconquerable hatred of royal authority. But with the

Restoration there was a revival of satire proper, though, with the increasing inclination towards political partisanship, it was directed now rather against political affairs than against the doings and fashions of the Court. Yet through it all there runs a strain of complaint against the vice of the King and his friends, and against their pleasure-loving existence, which made them deaf to the appeals of the nation. Perhaps the loudest of the satirists is Milton's friend, Andrew Marvell, though Rochester has dared in no ambiguous terms to give his opinion of the standard of life that prevailed at Court, despite the fact that he himself was as deep in the mire as any of them. Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" too, written under the instruction of Charles himself, deserves mention for its trenchant criticisms on the principal courtiers.

As most of the prominent writers of the Restoration were in the Court employ, and gained their livelihood by following Court tastes, it is not to be expected that there will be much satire directed against prevalent literary fashions. The absurdity of heroic dramas for which the King himself declared a partiality<sup>1</sup> has been ridiculed in Butler's "Cat and Puss at a Caterwauling." Buckingham's attack on the heroic manner in his clever play "The Rehearsal" was made rather

Earl of Orrery: Preface to his Plays, and Dryden: Dedication to "The Indian Emperor"



with the personal motive of taking vengeance on the Poet Laureate than because he really disapproved of the taste of the Court, which he had sanctioned by his patronage. Nevertheless he had a true perception of the weak points in the heroic drama. His steady aim at the bombastic style, the French affectations, the poor sentiment and the faulty character-study, went right home, and though it did not kill the heroic play on the spot, it dealt it a mortal blow.

The prevalence of occasional verse during our period is a sign of the close connection between literature and the Court, as well as evidence of the popularity that poetry enjoyed in Court circles. Whenever any great event took place, it was sure to be attended by hosts of occasional verses, lamenting royal misfortunes, or eulogising royal triumphs. Of such a kind were the poems produced at Christmas or Shrovetide, or for the occasion of courtly entertainments, the poems "gratulatorie" on the accession of a monarch, or the "tears" that attended his death. These might perhaps be termed patriotic occasional verses. But there is occasional poetry of yet another kind. It became the custom for poets to write elegies and epitaphs on the death of any Court personage, and also to compose verses for the purpose of flattering patrons. From this it may be imagined that occasional poetry does not rank

among the highest forms of composition since, by its very nature, it manifests little genuine feeling and is chiefly concerned in saying pretty things in elegant style, in order to flatter the vanity of the mighty.

Queen Elizabeth herself seems to have afforded a precedent which her Court might follow, for Puttenham in his "Arte of English Poesie" (1589) while praising her skill in ode, elegy or epigram, tells us that on one occasion when she stood in great fear of a rising in favour of Mary Queen of Scots "writeth this ditty most sweet and sententious, not hiding from all such aspiring minds the danger of their ambition and disloyaltie." Spenser was the first great poet to follow her example. His finest composition was written in honour of his Queen, and has the distinction of being one of the best and warmest expressions of Elizabethan patriotism. His "Daphnaida" (1591) and his "Astrophel" (1595) are of the personal type of occasional verse. The former is "an Elegy on the Death of the noble and virtuous Douglas Howard, daughter and heir of Henry Lord Howard, Viscount Byndon, and wife of Arthur Gorges, Esquire" while the latter was one among the innumerable elegies that mourned the death of that "very jewel of Elizabeth's Court" Sir Philip Sidney. The "Prothalamium" (1596) is interesting not only as celebrating

a double marriage at Court, but for its autobiographical value, since it throws light upon the author's connection with one of the most magnificent patrons of literature, the Earl of Leicester.

In 1599 Sir John Davies published a series of twenty-six Acrostics under the title of "Hymns of Astraea" into each of which, with wondrous skill, he has worked the name Elizabeth. The Queen's death in 1603 was the signal for multitudes of effusions. Henry Chettle (1540 - 1604) expressed grief at his Sovereign's death in a pastoral poem called "England's mourning garment worn here by Plain Shepherds in Memory of Elizabeth", Thomas Newton (died 1607) produced "Tears of her Funeral", while the not-inconsolable author of "Angliorum Lachrymae", "in a sad passion" complains "the death of our late Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth, yet comforted againe by the vertuous hopes of our most Royall and Renowned King James." But alas, the hearts of the ungrateful majority had no room for grief at the death of the Virgin-Queen; they were too full of rejoicing over the yet untried "virtues" of the glorious monarch, King James. The smooth-tongued Daniel with sweetly flowing lines, well judged to satisfy the taste of any monarch, breaks forth in swelling strains of jubilation.-

"Lo here the glory of a greater day,  
Than England ever heretofore could see  
In all her days" ...

and "Glory of men, this hast thou brought to us,  
And yet hast brought us more than this by far;  
Religion comes with thee, peace, righteousness,  
Judgement and justice"

And so he continues for seventy-five eight-lined stanzas.  
Ben Jonson, too, honoured his Sovereign's accession though  
in strains more moderate both with regard to flattery and  
length. The unfortunate Michael Drayton endeavoured to  
engage his royal master's favour by "A Gratulatory Poem"  
and a "Paeon Triumphall" but James took a dislike to this  
unlucky aspirant from the first time he saw him.

Drummond of Hawthornden (1585 - 1649) met with more  
favour at the hands of the Scottish prince. One of his  
first compositions was "Tears of the Death of Moeliades"  
(1613) in which he, among numerous other poets, Campion,  
Chapman, etc. commemorated the death of England's darling,  
Prince Henry of Wales. In 1617 when King James visited  
Scotland after an absence of twelve years, Drummond composed  
in his honour a poem, "Forth Feasting." Drummond's  
complimentary taste is of a very high order. He had made

great study of the Elizabethan lyrists, and something of their ease and elegance seems to have clung to him. He puts his praise of James in the mouth of the Genius of the River in a way that reminds us of Spenser's Marriage of the Thames and Medway. Yet it is remarkable that the panegyric verse of James' reign shows far less of the spirit of inspired patriotism than that of the previous reign. The King's incompetency in affairs took away from that feeling of complete reliance upon their ruler with which the nation had sincerely honoured the Queen. He disenchanted the people and broke down the bond of sympathy between King and Commons. Thus the flattery offered to King James seems mere empty verbiage.

"Stare I that living face, see I those looks,  
Which with delight wont to amaze my brooks?  
Do I behold that worth, that man divine,  
This age's glory, by these banks of mine?  
Then it is true, what long I wish'd in vain,  
That my much loving prince is come again?"

On James' return from the Scotch journey, which Drummond had so successfully commemorated, Campion, the musician-poet, and a writer of masques for Court performance, contrived some entertainment for him in the "Ayres that were

sung and played at Brougham Castle" (1618).

In 1629 there appeared an interesting volume dedicated "to the King's (Charles I) Most Excellent Majestie", from the pen of Sir John Beaumont, the author of "Bosworth Field." Among these "Royal and Courtly Poems" as he calls them, we find ample testimony to the fashionable custom of writing verses on the slightest of pretexts. One was written "on the Anniversary day of his Maiestie's (King James) Reign over England, another is "A Thanksgiving for the deliverance of our Sovereigne" from an accident which befel him on a certain January 8th. A third constrains "Ye nymphs" to "weepe" for King James. "A sudden darkenesse" has fallen upon the earth at the death of the English Solomon. Yet through the oppressive gloom there shines a ray of light. Shall not Charles himself scatter the dread clouds that for a moment cast a shadow over the nation? Even so changeful were the aspirants of Court favour.

During the reign of King Charles the popularity of occasional verse increased among the courtiers, though that spirit of devoted patriotism which characterised the poetry of Elizabeth's reign, is silent for ever. Nevertheless there was a sense of pride in the improved state of Court life, and

the virtue of the royal example was praised in masque and poem. Waller was the principal writer of occasional verse, indeed nearly all his work is of this kind - and he seems to have set a fashion in it, which other courtiers eagerly and easily imitated. In 1621 while still quite a young courtier he addressed a poem "To the King, on his Navy", and in 1623 he congratulated Prince Charles on his lucky escape from drowning in the harbour of St. Andero. The marriage of the King with Henrietta Maria seems to have given stimulus to the occasional manner, in the imitation of French literary fashions. Hence we find Waller and other poets writing numerous copies of verses on any slight incident at Court; "On the discovery of a lady's painting", "Written on a card that Her Majesty tore at ombre"; "Of tea, commended by Her Majesty" which begins in the following manner -

"Venus her myrtle, Phoebus has his bays;

Tea both excels, which she vouchsafes to praise."

Waller was professedly a Royalist at heart, but no qualms of conscience forbade him to write in honour of "My Lord Protector." This did not, however, prevent him from commemorating "His Majesty's Happy Return" in 1660, though Charles II was so ungrateful as to doubt the sincerity of

his feelings.

Although Herrick had banished himself from Court, his heart was still with the gay throng in London. Besides joining in the general thanksgivings that attended the births of Prince Charles, afterwards Charles II, and James, Duke of York, he wrote songs to be performed before the King at Whitehall at Christmas, Shrovetide, etc. which were set to music by the best Court musicians. Be it said that these were not in the conventional strain of exaggerated panegyric, but were generally charming songs, appropriate to the occasion. They remind us somewhat of Milton's "Nativity Ode." They still retain something of that joyous spirit which characterised the works of the "tribe of Ben", and which was so soon to give place to the marble elegance of the fashion set by Waller.

The passionless "sugar'd" verses of the reigning wit of Charles I's Court soon acquired an astonishing popularity among the courtiers. Waller was not a genius, and to write like him only meant imitating a courtly manner of paying compliment. The age that gave the Laureateship a definite standing by voting it a pension and a fixed title was bound to produce a great deal of occasional verse, since that was



one of the conditions of the office. Ben Jonson, the first virtual Poet Laureate, evidently found his duties somewhat irksome, for as we have seen the payment of his pension was temporarily discontinued. But Dryden, the first poet to bear the name of Laureate, found his duties quite congenial. Like Waller he was able to appreciate the fine qualities of both Protector and King. In 1660 he greeted the new monarch with "Astraea Redux" and in 1661 he wrote a "Panegyric on the Coronation." These and other "occasional" effusions seem to have given pleasure to His Majesty and the Court, for, in 1670, the King created him Poet Laureate, and from that moment made ample use of his willing servant. In 1680, at the command of the King, Dryden did his best to strengthen the royal cause by the publication of "Absalom & Achitophel"; in 1682 he undertook the "Religio Laici" in support of the religious party at Court, while in 1683 the King engaged him on the translation of Maimbourg's "History of the League." Such an attentive master could not pass to his grave unlamented, though "Threnodia Augustalis" found Dryden's grief turned to joy at the thought of favours likely to be gleaned from King James II. In 1688, in the last of Court panegyrics, Dryden, from the courtiers' and not the nation's point of view, celebrated the birth of an heir to the throne in "Britannia Rediviva."

### COURT INFLUENCE ON 17th. CENTURY PROSE. III.

We have already noticed the extensive influence exerted on the poetry of the period by the interest of the Court, especially that of Elizabeth, in foreign languages and translations. On prose literature the impression has been no less marked. The pioneers of every new 'genre' looked to other nations for support in the all-important period of apprenticeship. Prose romance, quite a new branch of literature written for the amusement of the Court, was trained in Italian and Spanish leading-strings, and nourished on Greek and Italian fables. Books of travel and adventure written by the men of action at the Courts of Elizabeth and James I derived their origin from similar treatises in Spanish and Portuguese. In 1587 Hakluyt translated Peter Martyr's "De Orbo Novo." The "Character" first tried in English by the wits of James I's Court shows an intimate sympathy with the aims of Greek schools of rhetoric. Courtesy books resulted from the interest in the new ideal of a gentleman which swept over the best educated part of society, owing to the popularity of Castiglione's "Il Cortegiano",<sup>2</sup> while letter-writing and criticism were equally inspired by foreign precedent.

By far the greatest monument of courtly scholarship is the Authorised Version of the Bible, published in 1611.

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge History of Literature. Elizabethan Prose Fiction

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Smith: Introduction to Elizabethan Critical Essays

The way for such a work had already been paved by the most cultured minds of Elizabeth's Court,<sup>1</sup> who manifested unwearied zeal in translation, besides helping our English prose far on its journey towards self-realisation. The new monarch kept up the tradition of his predecessor in the patronage of letters, to which he added an insatiable love of theological controversy. The religious atmosphere - however superficial - which he created about him, proved eminently congenial to so great an undertaking as the translation of the Bible, and may fairly be credited with having contributed to the excellence of the work. In 1604 at the Hampton Court Conference summoned by royal command, "His Highness", King James, according to Doctor Reynolds, Dean of Chester, "wished that some especial pains should be taken for one uniform translation professing that he could never yet see a Bible well translated in English." When it was suggested to him that he should set himself at the head of so great an enterprise, he was transported with the idea; it gratified his vanity and was congenial to his tastes. It was James himself who proposed the leading features of the scheme, and to him were submitted the names of the fifty-four revisers. To do him justice, he manifested great common sense in the performance of so important a matter. Among the instructions, we find, in accordance with James' special desire, "No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the

<sup>1</sup> Hoare: The English Bible.

explanation of the Hebrew and Greek words which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text", for it was the marginal notes to which he objected in "the worst of all Bibles"-as he called the Geneva - on account of their theological bias. His care in procuring as exact and true a rendering as possible of the original is seen both here and in the ninth instruction, where it is laid down that "as any one company hath despatched any one book in this manner, they shall send it to the rest to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for His Majesty is very careful in this point."

The first branch of literature with which we have to deal is Elizabethan prose fiction, which was of a two-fold nature. The one form belonged exclusively to the Court, while the other confined itself to the tastes of the people. The main aim of the novel was to provide amusement likely to please the Court which easily achieved the supreme position in the national life, so that all the efforts of contemporary writers were directed towards satisfying the courtier's needs.<sup>1</sup> But at the close of the century, when the Court had become dislodged from its position of preeminence, and the tastes of the people swayed England, the 'bourgeois' element asserted itself in the novel, and the brief reign of Elizabethan Court Romance came to an end.

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge History of Literature - English Prose Fiction.

Lyly's "Euphues" or "The Anatomie of Wit" (1579) written expressly to gratify Court taste, was the first piece of prose fiction in our literature. Emboldened by its success, Lyly published a sequel, "Euphues and his England" (1580). It was under the patronage of Burleigh and under the influence of his austere Protestant rule that Lyly set to work upon these romances. Here, as in every characteristically Elizabethan composition, the beauty of Renaissance learning was united with the moral earnestness of the Reformation, which was still warmly championed by the more serious spirits of the Court, of whom we may instance Spenser and Sidney. The time was not yet past when a work of art had to justify itself on moral grounds. This was precisely the reason why the "Cortegiano" received such an overwhelming welcome, so that it became a source of inspiration to much of contemporary literature. It was under Castiglione's influence that Spenser in verse, and Lyly in prose, made it their aim to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Lyly took the hero of his novel from Asham's "Scholemaster" where Euphues is described as "he that is apt by wit and applicable by readiness of will to learning, having all other mental and bodily accomplishments to serve learning."

Lyly's novels as already indicated, were written under

<sup>1</sup> Feuillerat: Lyly.

Court influence, and with the express intention of appealing to refined taste. "Euphues" is dedicated "To the Ladies and Gentlewomen of England" exhorting them to "take the pains to read it, but at such times as you spend in playing with your little Dogges." "Euphues", Lyly continues, "had rather lye shut in a Ladyes casket then open in a Schollers studie." His aim was to provide the highest society with a prose literature of an agreeable, and at the same time beneficial nature. Being himself a courtier and an aspirant to fame, he gave due consideration to the taste of his readers. He endeavoured to grip the interest by giving a vivid picture of contemporary manners, for which, as a shrewd observer of the life he saw about him, he was eminently fitted. He also designedly enriched his narrative with love tales and letters between lovers, which he knew would please. His scheme was singularly successful, for a self-conscious society like that of Elizabeth's reign, loves to see itself through the eyes of another. This kind of novel quickly became the vogue, and Euphues soon found himself in every sort of situation, and travelling all over the world.

It was not only in the intention of his work that Lyly fastened with unerring aim on the taste of the Court, but also in the subject-matter and the treatment of his theme. The plot was a stereotyped one used by Boccaccio in the

<sup>1</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry.

"Decamerone", and it had grown conventional by frequent use. Many of the sentiments, too, of the story are almost plagiarisms from foreign authors.<sup>1</sup> For his philosophical utterances he ransacked the ancients and many are the passages that he pillaged from Plutarch's "Moralia." To take one instance only, Lyly's advice on the bringing up of Children in "Euphues and His England" (1580), a sequel to "Euphues" is a literal translation of Plutarch's treatise "περὶ παιδείων ἡγεμονία". From the plunder of Pliny, he returned with some very curious booty. His fondness for similies taken from such a knowledge of natural history as was current in Pliny's time, has brought on him universal ridicule. Drayton mentions it among Sidney's virtues that he

"did first reduce

Our tongue from Lillie's writing then in use;  
Talking of stones, stars, plants, of fishes, flies,  
Playing with words, and idle similies."

Lyly's diligent efforts to gratify Court taste were crowned with exceptional success. His style won widespread applause as being a definite response to the demand of the Court for a refined and polished language differing from that of the common people. Its immediate origin, one writer tells us,<sup>2</sup> "lay in a certain stylistic tendency then fashionable in England, which in its turn originated in

<sup>1</sup> Feuillerat: Lyly

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge History of Literature, Chapter on English Prose Fiction.

an aim to improve the vernacular. It was due in part to the necessity for a courtly diction, in consequence of the growing interest which centred in the person and court of the monarch." Though there existed earlier examples of it in North<sup>1</sup> and Ascham<sup>2</sup>, Lyly was the first to give it definite form, and to bring it to the height of perfection.<sup>3</sup> He "hatched the egges his elder friendes laide."<sup>4</sup> His style would seem to have been encouraged by Elizabeth, for Lyly trained his wit to gain her favour,<sup>3</sup> but of this we may be sure, that it was calculated to please the witty assembly of the Court by its ingenious conflicts of wit displayed in argument upon some courtly theme, to which the fine ladies and gentlemen of Elizabeth's Court formally sat down as children now sit down to a round game of forfeits.

Lyly, as the embodiment of Court taste, wielded an enormous influence in the highest literary circles. "That beautie in Court which could not parley eupheueisme was as little regarded as shee which now there speakes not French" wrote Edward Blount the bookseller in 1632. By a reflex influence, then, the Euphuistic style, the accepted language of society, penetrated the fashionable literature of the time.<sup>2</sup> The success of "Euphues" paved the way for a long list of ponderous romances,<sup>3</sup> stimulated a love of balanced sentences, and witty conceits in writers both of prose and of verse.

<sup>1</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry

<sup>2</sup> Minto: Manual of English Prose

<sup>3</sup> Feuillerat: Lyly

<sup>4</sup> Blount: Preface to Lyly's "Euphues" 1632.



The Queen's skill in choice phrases, and her power as a linguist, as well as the tone of gallantry and affectation which prevailed at Court, may, with fairness, be held to have been favourable to the growth of Euphuism.<sup>1</sup> The character of James I, while it lowered the dignity of this literary affectation, at the same time extended its domain. The influence even continued into the reign of Charles I, and may be regarded as the origin of Caroline, Elizabethan and Jacobean conceit.

Of the numerous romances which Lyly's "Euphues" brought into fashion, and which all more or less undertook to describe further adventures of Euphues, the best are those of Greene (1560 - 1592) and Lodge (1558 - 1625). By this time the novel had served its apprenticeship, and the aim of providing courtly instruction had given place to that of affording courtly amusement.<sup>2</sup> By this it is not meant that moral intention is entirely absent, for Greene's "Euphues his Censure of Philantus" (1587) teaches "the vertues necessary in every gentleman", but that didactic intention was subordinated to artistic purpose. Greene wrote five novels in imitation of Lyly, of which "Pandosto" (1588) supplied Shakespeare with his "Winter's Tale." For his plots Greene drew on the Italian 'novella' while the pastoral colouring in "Pandosto", in "Mamillia" (1583) and in "Menaphon" (1589),

<sup>1</sup> Morley: English Writers

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge History of Literature

in which the scene was laid in Arcadia, were probably derived from Spanish and Italian sources or perhaps from Sidney's "Arcadia"<sup>1</sup> which was still in manuscript, and were introduced for the purpose of relieving the dullness of instruction in etiquette and morality. On~~e~~ Greene's style Euphuism has left an indelible impression. His work abounds in similies and metaphors, and even in Natural History. Lodge is famous as the author of "Euphues' Golden Legacy" or "Rosalynde" (1590), which Shakespeare utilised for his "As You Like It." In style, as well as in the use of the magic name of 'Euphues', he is a direct legatee of Lyly. With instructive obedience to courtly taste, he laid his scene in a delightful forest and took for his actors royal personages.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless he broke away from tradition by ignoring all moral intention, and he has consequently given all his thought to courtly entertainment.

Sidney's "Arcadia" marks another epoch in the history of the Court Romance. It was published in 1590, though written during his retirement from Court in 1580. Sidney was not very well satisfied with the life of the Court, as we have seen from his poem in "Dispraise of the Court." He shared the view of Hubert Languet, his great friend. "The habits of your Court", he writes to Sidney, "seemed to be somewhat less manly than I could have wished, and most of

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge History of Literature.

your noblemen appeared to me to seek for a reputation more by a kind of affected courtesy than by those virtues which are wholesome to the State." Sidney therefore welcomed his temporary banishment from the Court and employed his leisure in writing pastoral romance, in which the scene is laid far away from the turmoil and ambition of an artificial society. Sidney, like poor disillusioned Colin Clout, was out of patience with the self-seeking existence, and idle inactivity of the Court, and he sought refuge, as many others did, in the simplicity of rustic life. Nevertheless, he was still a courtier at heart. He admitted among his "dramatis personae" beings of royal descent, who had doffed their splendid habiliments in favour of a shepherd's smock. It is these noble swains who bear the burden of the narrative, while the real shepherds only serve as ornaments to his pastoral scene. Sidney's romance is a curious medley of rustic simplicity and courtly gallantry. In fact, the atmosphere is in itself ideal. With a love of the Court and a contempt for its foibles, Sidney has created for himself an Arcadia where royal shepherds and shepherdesses, whose manner of life is sincere and unexceptionable, hold their simple, yet gallant Court, far removed from the tainted breath of flattery.

In tone and spirit this work entirely corresponds to the tastes of the Elizabethan Court. In the first place it

owes a great debt to Montemayor and Heliodorus as well as to ancient mythology.<sup>1</sup> Moreover it is the production of a travelled young man of the Court. The love of pictorial art which he indulged in Italy in common with contemporary Court gallants, manifests itself in several descriptions evidently reminiscent of masterpieces he had seen abroad.<sup>2</sup> To gratify the taste of his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, in whose honour and for whose amusement he undertook this romance, he offered incense both to virtue and to chivalry. Like Lyly, he belonged to the number of those who value art from the point of view of its moral force. Sidney could not, therefore, forbear to mingle his stories of jousts and tournaments with passages of courtly instruction. He endeavoured in his "Arcadia" to reconstruct an ideal state of chivalry, of gallant, noble-hearted knights and gracious ladies, such as he had vainly dreamed of at Court.<sup>3</sup> Based on the influence of Castiglione, the "Arcadia" was regarded in its own day as a perfect manual of courtesy and refined integrity. The work is a monument of good-breeding, and it breathes forth the best of that chivalric spirit that was to be found in Court circles.<sup>3</sup>

It was greeted with vehement applause, and soon reached such favour among the nobility that it immediately supplanted

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge History of Literature.

<sup>2</sup> Jusserand: The History of the Elizabethan Novel

<sup>3</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry

Courthope: History of English Poetry

"Euphues." As a second response to the courtly desire for a refined and picturesque language, it soon became the vogue at Court,<sup>1</sup> and called forth innumerable imitations, and although it was still in manuscript when Greene and Lodge were writing, yet it seems very likely that they had some knowledge of it.

In spite of the welcome accorded the "Arcadia", the courtly novel was for a time superseded by popular fiction. With the French influence that came into literature through Henrietta Maria it was revived in imitation of French models. At all times fond of the pastoral, the Queen wielded a great influence in establishing a taste for the ponderous pastoral romances, which flourished at the Court of Versailles.<sup>2</sup> While all enjoyed the French "romans de longue haleine", the more literary spirits of the English Court, who belonged to 'salons' closely modelled on the Hôtel de Rambouillet, bravely undertook the task of translation. Among the favourites were "Polexandre" of Gomberville, "Artamène" of Scudéry, the "Cléopâtre" of La Calprenède, and "Clélie" by Mademoiselle de Scudéry. A translation of La Calprenède's "Cassandre" was dedicated by Sir Charles Cotterel "to the exiled Prince Charles" in 1652. An interest in these romances naturally extended into the

<sup>1</sup> Minto: Manual of English Prose

<sup>2</sup> Upham: French Influence in English Literature

reign of the French-nurtured King, Charles II, and they exerted an influence on our literature, not only by providing ample suggestion for the drama, but by challenging imitation. It soon became the fashion to write similar romances in English. The vogue extended well into the Commonwealth. In 1653 there appeared "Cloria and Narcissus" A Delightful and New Romance - written by an Honourable Person. Parts II and III followed in the two ensuing years, from which we may pretty correctly judge of their popularity. We have a further proof of its success in the fact that an enlarged version of the novel was welcomed in 1661. It is interesting to remark that very early in the history of these romances it became the fashion to shadow forth actual events, and real persons of the Court. In 1627 Sir Kenelm Digby published a romance containing the story of his love for the beautiful Venetia Stanley, who eventually became his wife. In his Dedication to his "Parthenissa" (1654) Roger Boyle, the future Earl of Orrery, admits an attempt at the portraiture of the Duchess of Northumberland, in the heroine of the story.

The novel was perhaps related to the Court more closely than any other literary genre; yet there is a fairly considerable body of prose, outside the realm of fiction, which bears the marks of courtly interest. The revival of History during the reign of Elizabeth seems to

be an outcome of the enterprising spirit of the age, of the national sense of awakening,<sup>1</sup> to which the Queen herself so skilfully ministered. In this also the broader interests of the courtiers suggested a mode of procedure, by following the lead of other literatures.<sup>2</sup> In 1579 Fenton, already the translator of Italian tales, made a version of Guicciardini's "History of Italy"; in 1584 a certain "B.R." turned two books of Herodotus into English. while the indefatigable Holland published his Livy in 1600.

It is significant that Sir Walter Raleigh contributed to Elizabethan Literature the first historical document of any note. In 1591 he wrote "A Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isles of the Acores, this last summer, betwixt the Revenge, one of Her Majestie's Shippes, and an Armada of the King of Spaine." It is the work of "a cultured man of action who partly found the secret of distinction in the school of life, in Camp and Courts."<sup>3</sup> This was followed in 1596 by "The Discoverie of Guiana." It was not until 1614 that he set to work upon his ambitious "History of the World" which was partly undertaken at the request and for the instruction of Prince Henry, who read part of it in manuscript, and took great pleasure in it. In style his work possesses dignity and courtly elegance,

<sup>1</sup> Gosse and Garnett: English Literature.

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge History of Literature.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabethan Literature: Some University Library.

and is marked by a display of erudition and wit, in which the learned monarch took perpetual delight. In a work like this it was inevitable that Raleigh should subscribe to the custom of his fellow-courtiers in praising the King, though he confined himself, in some measure, to the truth, by which he shows more moderation than the exuberant Bacon. That fallen Glory who had addressed his "Advancement of Learning" "To the most learned monarch ever known in Christendom", complimenting him on the possession of "Virtues and qualities which the philosophers call intellectual", and furthermore declaring him to be invested with "that triplicity which in great veneration was ascribed to the ancient Hermes; the power and fortune of a King, the knowledge and illumination of a priest, and the learning and universality of a philosopher," was not at a loss how to repair his shattered fortunes. He immediately set to work on the "History of Henry VII, which was undertaken with a view to appeasing King James by a flattering account of his ancestor, whom he represents as a prototype of the reigning monarch. Such exaggerated praise is only paralleled by the closeness with which he adheres to all tricks of style and composition which were likely to gratify the taste of the pedantic James. He humours his pedantry by introducing many Latin quotations without translating them, and adopts the use of similes and metaphors to suit the affected style of the Court.



It was unlikely that Samuel Daniel (1562 - 1619) should overlook any of the literary activities prominent at Court, or those by which ambitious courtiers were wont to pour flattery into the ear of their King. Having already tried his hand at the masque and the sonnet, he now essayed history. From 1613 to 1618 he was engaged upon a "History of England" which extended from the Conquest to the accession of Henry VII. It is chiefly remarkable for its ease, elegance of style and purity of diction. In its urbanity of expression it is characteristically courtly. The last historical work in any way influenced by the Court is the "Life and Reign of King Henry VIII" (1649) by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the elder brother of George Herbert, the poet. It is interesting as being accompanied by "A General History of the Times", which gives a picture of the life and the educational ideals of the Court. This, with a "Defence of the Duke of Buckingham" addressed to Charles I, was, like Bacon's "History of Henry VII", undertaken to conciliate the King.

The "Character", which came into being in James I's reign, was, in its origin, closely bound up with the Court. The courtiers of the time were emboldened by the example of Theophrastus - whose "Characters" had been translated into Latin by Casaubon in 1592 - to make a criticism of society from their own point of view.<sup>1</sup> By means of the "Character"

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge History of Literature.

they hoped to impress the ruling classes with a greater culture and refinement. This they intended to accomplish by calling attention to what was sordid both in the Court and in the rest of society. At first the Character was regarded as a form of amusement, and by its very nature, it lent itself to easy composition in hours of leisure. Its polished style and witty phrase proclaim its courtly origin. Sir Thomas Overbury was the first to write in this new manner. In 1614 the second edition of his poem "A Wife" was published, with twenty-one Characters appended, some by himself and some by his imitators. They present a picture of society from the courtier's standpoint. The subject for consideration is generally the Court or that phase of society which bore greatest contrast with it. It is interesting to hear a courtier comment on his own class in society. "A courtier", says Overbury, "to all mens thinking is a man, and to most men the finest; but his surest marke is that he is to be found only about princes. He putteth away much of his judgement about the situation of his clothes. He knowes no man that is not generally knowne ... He followes nothing but inconstancie, admires nothing but beautie, honours nothing but fortune. Loves nothing ... He is not, if he be out of Court, but fish-like breaths destruction if out of his owne element ... If you find him

not here, you shall in "Pauls", with a picket tooth in his hat, a cape cloak, and a long stocking." The Hypocrite is a character of the opposite type of society. Ignorance, and an unconquerable hatred of learning are his chief follies. He objects against Latin, that it is "the language of the beast; Greeke the tongue wherein the heathen poets wrote their fictions; Hebrew, the speech of the Jewes that crucified Christ; controversies doe not edifie; logicke and philosophie are the subtilties of Sathan to deceive the simple." The only use for such a man in the world says Overbury is that he may be a warning to others to shun the follies in which he himself fondly indulges.

The Character soon became popular among the courtiers by reason of their growing interest in the manners of society. In 1615 John Stephens published a volume of "Satyrical Essayes, Characters and others", in which he has given some view of Court life in the Character of the "Page." These were followed by many other works of a similar nature, of which the most noteworthy are the "Characters" of Earle (1628). From the study of them we get a glimpse into the life of every branch of society. In their wit they reflect the taste of the Court, and the frequent tone of mockery in some of the writers betokens the decay of chivalry which we remarked in the works of Suckling.

The Courtesy Books and Moral treatises deserve mention as taking their influence most directly from the Court. The list of English prose compositions which took their inspiration from Castiglione and Guevara, is headed by Lyly's "Euphues", with which we have already dealt. Bacon, too, contributed to it. Besides certain of his "Essays" which treat with the education of Children, with studies etc. the "New Atlantis" may be regarded as reflecting the Elizabethan ideal of courtesy. The politeness of the inhabitants of New Atlantis to the strangers, and vice versa, the ceremony with which all treated the head of Salomon's House, as well as the ideal institutions for the comfort and mental advancement of the inhabitants of the place, give evidence of the influence of the new ideals of Court life. Besides this, certain books were written with the undisguised design of making gentlemen and gentlewomen. We have instances of these in Peacham's "Complete Gentleman" (1622) and Braithwaite's "English Gentleman" (1630) which was followed by his "English Gentlewoman" (1631).

The influence of the Court on the purely moral literature is seen in the sermons of Andrewes and Donne. Bishop Andrewes was a favourite preacher of both Elizabeth's and James's Court, and his sermons were collected for publication by Charles I. His style was marked by cumbrously superfluous quotation, learned allusion, and fanciful word-play, all

well-calculated to suit the taste of the pedant-King and his Court, who delighted in literary affectation and went to Church to hear the language of the preacher. This, of necessity, detracted from the moral earnestness of the discourse, and deprived it of all real merit. Nevertheless the fashion soon gained hold on all preachers who hoped for preferment and popularity. Donne (1573 - 1631) entered the Church in 1616 at King James' request, and became royal Chaplain. It was his mission to preach to high society, whose taste he soon learned to flatter by becoming an apt pupil in all the faults of style practised by Andrewes.

The critical temper had its birth among the learned courtiers of Elizabeth's reign. Apart from Cheke's "Disputatio de Pronunciatione Linguae Graecae" and Wilson's "Arte of Rhetorick" there was practically no criticism until Elizabeth's reign. Then, in 1571 Roger Ascham, famous as the tutor of the Princess Elizabeth, and the ill-fated Lady Jane, produced his "Scholemaster", half courtesy-book, half criticism, in which romance tales and the loose Italian "novella" - the delight of the Italianate youth - were lustily attacked, and the use of the vernacular was advocated with great warmth. In the growing national consciousness, the learned men of the Court, with a firm belief in the merits of our language, began to enquire

earnestly into the state of our literature with a view to giving it an exalted position among the known literatures of the world. They advocated the use of our own tongue in preference to Latin; they sought to transplant the best metres of foreign versification into our own literature, and by imitation of every kind they hoped to improve its standard. In consequence of this it was inevitable that Elizabethan criticism should run along the lines of comparison with other literatures.

It was from the Court that the earliest and most important critical work of our period, Sidney's "Defense of Poesie", issued forth in 1581. Sidney was a prominent member of the Court, a liberal patron of letters, a fashionable poet, and, with his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, the leader of a literary coterie among the nobility. From him, then, we are able to gain an insight into the courtier's point of view. Sidney defends poetry on the grounds of its popularity with the ancients; he esteems our literary 'genres' according as they conform to classical canon, and he defends our poetry in comparison with contemporary foreign achievements. It is interesting, too, to notice that Sidney represents the attitude of one branch of the Court to works of art in defending poetry on the grounds of its moral efficacy.<sup>1</sup> His tastes in poetry are refined and reflect the Elizabethan love

<sup>1</sup> Feuillerat: Lyly.

of the beautiful. On the subject of prose he shows a strong antipathy to the prevailing Euphuism, which, by his "Arcadia", he succeeded in suppressing to a great extent. In the "Defense" his style is that of a learned and cultured man of society, and is marked in places by truly Elizabethan delicacy of fancy. The whole tone of the treatise in its elegance and urbanity, breathes forth the atmosphere of the Court.

In 1589, George Puttenham, a scholar and a courtier, published his "Arte of English Poesie" in which he proclaims the standard of English diction to be that language "which is spoken at the King's Court." According to the conclusion it was addressed to the Queen. "I write", he says, "to the pleasure of a lady and a most gracious Queen ... always endeavouring to do your Majestie the greatest of those services I can." He assures us of the popularity of literature at Court even at a time "when it was a discredit for a gentleman to show himself amorous of any good Arte." "I know very many notable gentlemen in the Court that have written commendably ... In her Maiesties time that now is are sprong up an other crew of Courtly makers, Noblemen and Gentlemen of her Maiesties owne servantes, who have written excellently well, as it would appeare if their doings could be found out and made publicke with the rest;

of which number is first that noble Gentleman Edward Earle of Oxford, ... Sir Philip Sydney, Sir Walter Rawleigh, Master Edward Dyar, Maister Fulke Greuell, Gascon, Britton, Turberville, and a great many other learned Gentlemen .. But last in recitale and first in degree is the Queene our Sovereign Lady", of whose poetical achievements he proceeds to give a most exaggerated account.

Among the minor critics of this period, Sir John Harrington deserves mention for the treatise prefixed to his translation of "Orlando Furioso" (1591) written by royal command, in which he praises Ariosto. Campion, the musician-poet, in 1602 published an essay in virtual refutation of his best poetry, by defending the tenets of the courtly company of critics, known as the Areopagus. Daniel, in his reply to Campion, in the "Defense of Rhyme" (1603) dedicated to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, represents the view of the other Court party. This is the last critic of note until we come to the father himself of English criticism, who began his apprenticeship in the art by slavishly following Court taste, and ended by giving rein to his own judgement even in the face of convention.

Dryden's first pieces of criticism appear in the Dedications, Prologues and Epilogues of his plays in which he alternately praises and blames the use of rhyme in



tragedy according to the prevailing taste at Court. In his essay on "The Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age" he voices the attitude of the Restoration Court to the Elizabethan dramatic masterpieces. The language of the older stage was vulgar and unrefined, since it lacked the influence of the cultured fluent Charles; the manner of this benighted stage was crude, since it had not the advantage of French influence such as the heroic plays of the blessed Restoration could boast. Witness the change which came over his criticisms when, breaking free from the trammels of Court convention, Dryden gave rein to his common sense in the "Essay on Dramatic Poetrie", suggested by the "Examens" of Corneille. Shakespeare and Jonson became in a trice the lions of the drama and their works were proclaimed unapproachable by the best examples that foreign literatures could afford.

In style Dryden's two best critical essays, the "Essay on Dramatic Poesy" and the "Preface to the Fables" are models of that clearness and simplicity which Dryden attributes to the conversational powers of the King. They are refined and well-bred in tone, reflecting the spirit of the Court. But it was not only by his conversation that Charles inspired an interest in simple prose style. By his support of the Royal Society he exerted an ~~far~~ *equally*

greater influence. The early aims of the young Society were directed towards a reformed prose. "There is one thing more about which the Society has been most solicitous; and that is the manner of their Discourse: - They have been most vigorous in putting into execution the only Remedy that can be found for extravagance, and that has been a constant Resolution to reject all amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness when men deliver'd so many things almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can."<sup>1</sup>

A last word must be said with regard to letter-writing. The practice was begun under the influence of Henrietta Maria, and French fashions. It was part of the scheme of the salons of Versailles to interest themselves in letter-writing, from which their imitators took it up. The versatile Sir John Suckling was among the best known of those who wrote letters intended for the public eye. He modelled his work on Voiture who enjoyed an enormous popularity at Court, but who was not translated into English until 1655 by John Davies. Like the rest of his compositions Suckling's letters were written in an elegant, mocking vein,

<sup>1</sup> Taken from citation in Cambridge History of Literature.

marked by a daring, yet graceful gallantry. Dorothy Osborne's letters to Sir William Temple between the years 1652 and 1654 were written according to French models - she was an ardent lover of French literature - though they show fewer signs of conventionality. In 1660 Sir Toby Matthews (died 1655) a courtier, printed a collection of letters of which some were taken from French models while others were mere conventional imitations of French fashions. Perhaps the most typical example of this coterie letter-writing is to be seen in the correspondence between "the Matchless Orinda" and her Poliarchus. Writing in the true Platonic vein of the coteries, she based her style on the letters interspersed among the pompous romances, and her work is most characteristic of the spirit and manner of the time.

#### THE DRAMA IV.

We have said that the relationship between the Court and the literature is of a very varied nature. In the drama practically every phrase of this relationship is exemplified. Professor Thorndike tells us that "if in England the professional actors finally took possession of the drama, there was a long period extending through three-quarters of the 16th. century in which school and Court were the leaders and innovators. After that time the Universities and schools contributed little that was of importance to the history of the drama, but the Court continued to exercise a varied and constant influence on the public theatre."

In the first place the life of the Court has left a distinct impression on the drama of the period, whether through reflection or through satire on its foibles. Often, as in the case of Lyly, and Beaumont and Fletcher, the Court dramatist set himself to produce a picture of society, based on a shrewd observation of its manners, while men of more serious calibre like Jonson and Massinger, were moved to an expression of uncontrolled contempt. Such works were very different in character from those that held the popular stage, though these were often produced by command at Whitehall with the addition of an epilogue and prologue in honour of the occasion. As a rule such plays were welcomed with approval,

<sup>1</sup> "Shakespeare's Theater": Thorndike

though "The Knight of the Burning Pestle" with its ridicule of the heroic vein, shows that the courtiers were not universally charmed with the taste of the London citizen.

With these plays of a popular character may be compared those written expressly for presentation at Court, and designedly calculated, by a close adherence to the taste of their audience, to give undoubted satisfaction. Throughout the period this taste was directed towards foreign literatures. In consequence there is a large number of plays due entirely to translation, while almost all are indebted, in some measure, to foreign influence emanating from the Court. Finally, it was inevitable that in an age when literature was to so great an extent dependent upon the sympathy of the Court, the dramatists should take frequent occasion to flatter their liberal patrons, especially when that patron happened to be no less a person than the monarch. It is not surprising, then, that the honour and glory of the Queen should be made the theme of all Lyly's plays, and that even a genius like Jonson should not scorn to pour cajoling praises into the ear of his "Phoebus",<sup>1</sup> for, as Professor Ward tells us,<sup>2</sup> "the bounty of Court patronage could supply professional requirements, that is, it lay with the Court to ensure the existence of dramatic literature."

<sup>1</sup> Cynthia's Revels

<sup>2</sup> History of Dramatic Literature.

(a) Plays reflecting or satirising Court life.

The work of John Lyly, as might be expected from its being written expressly to suit Court taste, is crowded with covert references to the doings of the society in which he moved. "Sapho & Phao" (1581), "Endimion" (1585) and "Midas" (1589) are comedies in which real persons of the Court are shadowed forth under allegorical and classical names, partly to shield the author and partly to gratify the taste of his audience for mystery and mythology.<sup>1</sup> The Queen herself is the heroine of his plays and it is possible to detect other personages of the Court among the rest of the characters. "Sapho & Phao", acted at Court on "Shrove-tuesday" 1582 by the Children of St. Paul's and of the Chapel, was an allegory of the Duke of Alençon's unsuccessful suit for the hand of the Queen. Elizabeth, as Sapho, has preeminence over Venus herself, as Queen of Love. Phao, the Duke of Alençon, being unhappy in his love for Sapho leaves Sicily with an unaltered devotion for the lady who has slighted him. "With as litle malice wil I goe to my grave, as I did lye with all in my cradle. My life shal be spente in sighing and wishing, the one for my bad fortune, and the other for Saphoes good." This estimate of Alençon's feelings after having been kept in suspense by Elizabeth for so long, cannot but be amusing to the modern reader. "Endimion",

<sup>1</sup> Feuillerat: Lyly.

presented at Court by the Children of Paul's on "Candlemas day at night" in 1586, refers to Leicester's wooing of Elizabeth and her temporary displeasure with him. Besides this it shadows forth the rivalry between Elizabeth and Mary of Scots, who are represented by Cynthia and Tellus respectively. Besides this the play contains minor allegorical references to the quarrel between the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury - Geron and Dipsas - and to the relations between Astrophel and Stella - Eumenides and Semele. The love of Tellus for Endimion may be interpreted as referring to Leicester's visit to Scotland at the command of Queen Elizabeth, who regarded him as a likely suitor for the hand of Queen Mary. "Midas", acted before Elizabeth in 1590 on "Twelve Day at night", is a satire on King Philip II of Spain, representing the produce of his mines in South America by his desire to turn everything about him into gold; it contains, too, an accurate account of the defeat of the Armada in "the fruitless attempt of Midas to subdue the Island of Lesbos."

Besides making frequent allusions to incidents which have lost their interest to the modern reader, but which would be sure to please the audience for which he wrote, Lyly has given us a vivid picture of the manners and customs of the Court. He had a keen eye in observing these things,

Jusserand: History of England. Novel in Shakespeare's Time.

and he has endeavoured to give them as realistic an expression as possible. The advice of Sybilla to the love-sick Phao is a shrewd and rather trenchant criticism on Court beauties. "I woulde wish thee first to be diligent; for that womenne desire nothing more than to have their servants officious. Be alwaies in sight, but never slothful. Flatter, I meane lie; little things catch light mindes, and fancy is a worme that feedeth first upon feuell. Be prodigall in prayses and promises, bewtie must have a trumpet, and pride a gifte. There is none so foule that thinketh not her selfe faire." Pandion, the Scholar, is rather sceptical about the type of people he is likely to meet at Court. Trachinus, a courtier, gives advice to him.

Trach: Cease then to lead thy life in a study, pinned with a few boordes, and endeavour to be a courtier, to live in emboste rouffes.

Pandi: A labour intollerable for Pandion.

Trachi: Why?

Pandi: Because it is harder to shape a life to dissemble, then to goe forward with the libertie of trueth.

Trach: Why, do you thinke in Court any use to dissemble?

Pandi: Do you knowe in Court any that meane to live?

Again, when Trachinus and Pandion are discussing with the ladies of Sapho's Court the nature of the Queen's illness,



Trachinus suggests "Is it not love?"

Pandi: If it were, what then?

Trachi: Nothing, but that I hope it be not.

Pandi: Why in courtes there is nothing more common. And as to be bald among the Micanyans it was accounted no shame, because they were all balde; so to be in love among courtiers it is no discredit, for that they are al in love."

Such incisive comments on the customs and follies of the time paved the way for the later comedy of manners, which was imitated by Ben Jonson, and reached its climax in Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve.

Different as were the life and genius of Lyly and Shakespeare, the writings of both have come within the all-embracing reach of Court influence. All that we know of Shakespeare testifies to the great dramatist's familiarity with the life of society. "He had been present" says Professor Raleigh "at Court ceremonies; he delighted in that quickness of courtly speech, and in that graciousness and urbanity of bearing which is sometimes found in his princely men, and always in his great ladies." But besides transferring to certain of his creations the tone and spirit of the Court, he has, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" given us a picture of the manner in which revels were organised in the households of the nobility. It was the custom for every courtier to have in

his train actors capable of providing him and his guests with entertainment'. All the talent therefore among his household was likely to be requisitioned for Court performances and no man need lack an opportunity to develop and to display his natural endowments. Of Tarleton Fuller says "He was in the field, keeping his father's swine, when a servant of Robert, Earl of Leicester ... was so pleased with his happy unhappy answers, that he brought him to Court, where he became the most famous jester of Queen Elizabeth." From "A Midsummer Night's Dream" we learn that it was the custom for these players, belonging to noble households, to present themselves to any nobleman's Master of the Revels, and to submit to him a list of plays from which his lord might make a choice.

Theseus: "Say, what abridgment have you for this evening?

What masque? what music? How shall we beguile

The lazy time, if not with some delight?"

Philostrate: "There is a brief how many are ripe;

Make choice of which your highness will see first"

Theseus reads through the list and decides upon

"A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth."

The Prologue then enters and, after the customary explanation has been made, the play begins. It was in these wandering

Raleigh: Shakespeare

companies of noblemen's servants that the true beginnings of drama are to be found,<sup>1</sup> and the type of subject chosen by Theseus, dealing with classical mythology, was that which met with most frequent presentation at Court.

In Ben Jonson's two plays, "Cynthia's Revels" and "The Case is Altered" we have a further account of contemporary theatricals in the description of the way in which gallants behaved at the playhouse. From this it is easy to see what an influence they had in giving direction to the efforts of the dramatist. It was the custom for the courtiers to take up their position on the stage, in full view of all the audience, and to express openly their attitude towards the play. In the Induction to "Cynthia's Revels" 'Child 3' impersonates the behaviour of the courtier. "Now, sir, suppose I am one of your genteel auditors, that am come in, having paid my money at the door, with much ado, and here I take my place and sit down. I have my three sorts of tobacco in my pocket, my light by me, and thus I begin. By this light I wonder that any man is so mad to come to see these rascally tits play here - They do act like so many wrens or pismires - not the one fifth part of a good face amongst them all - And then their music is abominable - able to stretch a man's ears worse than ten pillories, and their ditties - most lamentable things, like the pitiful fellows that make them - poets."

<sup>1</sup> Raleigh: Shakespeare.

Jonson complains of the behaviour of the audience on the stage, and of their custom of criticising the play aloud. In "The Case is Altered" Act II Sc. IV, Valentine says "The people generally are very acceptive, and apt to applaud any meritable work, but there are two sorts of persons that most commonly are infectious to a whole auditory."

Balthazar: What be they?

Juniper: Ay, come let's know them.

Onion: It were good they were noted.

Valentine: Marry, one of the rude barbarious crew, a people that have no brains, and yet grounded judgements; these will have anything that mounts above their grounded capacities, but the other are worth the observation, i' faith

Onnes: What be they, what be they?

Valentine: Faith, a few capricious gallants.

Juniper: Capricious! stay that word's for me. And they take such a habit of dislike in all things that they will approve nothing, be it never so conceited or elaborate, but sit dispersed, making faces and spitting, and wagging their upright ears, and cry filthy! filthy! and using their wryed countenances instead of a vice, to turn the good aspects of all that sit near them from what they behold."

The behaviour of gallants, however, was not the only, nor yet the main theme of Jonson's work. He himself was well

versed in Court life, which he regarded with evident disgust. Much of his comedy, therefore, was written with the aim of improving the manners of the time by means of biting satire urged against the foibles of society. "After the atrocious execution of Mary" writes one author,<sup>1</sup> "Whitehall appears to have grown extremely dull. Elizabeth herself lost her spirits and became fretful and morose. The courtiers who could not be gay, became affected and exchanged their former fashions for fantastic and apish refinements. Euphuisme was now in full tide of prosperity, and the manners were as absurdly pedantic as the language. As Jonson lived much with the great, this could not altogether escape him; and it is not improbable that he was encouraged by some of those about the Queen to direct his satire against the reigning follies." By this means he hoped to scourge the courtiers out of their affectations.

With this aim he wrote "Every Man out of his Humour" in which he has set forth the courtier in all his phases. Fungoso is the pedant who, as Jonson describes him, "Follows the fashions afar off." Struck with the fine appearance of a gallant, his main aim in life is to put himself "in the courtier's cut." Puntarvolo is a travelled knight of the period, who, characteristically, stands high in his

<sup>1</sup>Gifford: Editor of Jonson's Works.

own favour and is well versed in the gentle art of paying high-flown compliment. In his pompous style he reminds us of Osric and Armado. Fastidious Brisk is the real thing in courtiers. The slave of fashion in his dress, he was wont to boast of his horses as of his accomplishments. Such were the courtly characters in the play which the Queen herself delighted to honour with her presence. For her entertainment, and as a respectful compliment to his Sovereign, Jonson altered the conclusion of his play into an elegant panegyric. Elizabeth was so well pleased with the performance that she gave encouragement to the author. "Great Eliza", wrote Lord Falkland -

"With her judicious favours did infuse

Courage and strength into his younger muse."

"Cynthia's Revels" described by the dramatist as a "comical satire" was first acted in 1600 by the Children of the Queen's Chapel. It was dedicated to the Court as "the Special Fountain of Manners" and was intended to ridicule the grave and formal behaviour of society. The gallants whose personalities are revealed to us in "Every Man out of his Humour" by their own words and deeds, are here described in a way that rather calls to mind the witty epigrammatic style of the "Character." Mercury makes it

his business to enlighten Cupid on the disposition of the gallants that present themselves at Cynthia's Court, at which they are invisible spectators. Hedon, as his name implies, is a "gallant wholly consecrated to his pleasures. He loves to have a fencer, a pedant, and a musician seen at his lodgings a mornings. He courts ladies with how many great horse he hath rid that morning, or how oft he hath done the whole, or half the pomado in a seven-night before." This description prepares the way for the entrance of the subject of conversation. He has been belabouring his brains for pretty speeches to make to the courtly dames in the presence-chamber. He has even gone to the extent of devising a delightfully "artless" scene to be enacted by himself and others for the benefit of his lady. Anaides, Mercury says, is not a courtier, though "He has two essential parts of the courtier, pride and ignorance." Amorphus, the courtier, is described as "a traveller, one so made out of the mixture of shreds of forms, that himself is truly deform'd. He walks most commonly with a clove or pick-tooth in his mouth, he is the very mint of compliment, all his behaviours are printed, his face is another volume of essays, and his beard is an Aristarchus. He speaks all cream skimm'd, and more affected than a dozen waiting-women. He is his own

promoter in every place." Asotus, a courtly aspirant, and a wealthy young man to whom Amorphus accords his favour for very patent reasons "is his (Amorphus) Zany, and doth most of these tricks after him; sweats to imitate him in everything to a hair, except a beard, which is not yet extant. He doth learn to make strange sauces ... because he loves them; speaks as he speaks, looks, walks, goes so in clothes and fashion; is in all as if he were moulded of him ... His eyes and his raiment confer much together, as he goes in the street." He even strives to acquire an expression of countenance which Amorphus tells him is to be noted in the "courtier elementary" as distinct from that worn by the "courtier practic" and the "courtier theoric." Finally he subscribes to the courtly fashion by engaging poets to write complimentary verses for him, though he is easily persuaded to deny all acquaintance with such vulgar people when in company. Nor did Jonson's galled pen neglect to indite grave accusations against the Court beauty, too, Philautia was "a most complete lady in the opinion of some three beside herself." Moria is a typical society dame, "a lady made all of voice and air, talks anything of anything. She will tell you Philosophy was a fine reveller when she was young, and a gallant, and that then, though she say it,



she was thought to be the dame Dido and Helen of the Court; as also, what a sweet dog she had this time four years, and how it was called Fortune." Such were the courtly foibles that delighted Jonson's popular audience, and we can easily devine the author's attitude to them by the description of Hermes, whose character is composed of traits exactly opposite to those that mark the courtier as Jonson saw him.

With the accession of the new monarch, a change came over the tone of the Court, which was accompanied by a corresponding alteration in the drama. The Court was entirely given up to the pursuit of pleasure; it increased the state of luxury and extravagance that prevailed in the previous reign, while it put aside the outward cloak of respectability. A new set of fashions was being instituted and these standards were first established at the Court of the King.<sup>1</sup> The changed order of things, the utter heedlessness of society to the more serious affairs of life, shocked the old retainers of the Queen. We have, as evidence, Sir John Harrington, Elizabeth's godson, and M. Tillières, the French ambassador, who wrote to France in 1621, "I have too much modesty to describe in the terms of strict truth things which one would rather suppress than commit in writing to ambassadorial despatches, destined for the perusal of distinguished persons." Such was the condition of the Court

<sup>1</sup> Crouch: Puritans & Art.

that it became the custom for players openly to mock its vices, and to direct personal insults against the sovereign. To such an extent was this the case that a law had to be passed forbidding the indictment of royalty in the theatre. A Court letter of the period tells us that "the players do not forbear to present upon their stage the whole course of this present time, not sparing either King, state or religion."<sup>2</sup> Examples of this are to be seen in Middleton's "A Game of Chess" which criticises the friendly relations of James I with the Spanish Court, and in Marston & Chapman's "Eastward Hoe" which reflects the public hatred of James' courtiers and countrymen. One speech runs thus; "You shall freely live there" (i.e. in Virginia) "without sergeants, or courtiers or lawyers, or intelligencers, only a few industrious Scots perhaps ... But as for them, there are no greater friends to Englishmen and England, when they are out in the world, than they are."

Under James I the drama had even more close connection with the Court than in Elizabeth's reign. "To be like the Court was a play's praise" Donne tells us, and in consequence the theatre of the period bears a marked impress of the artificial manners and unrefined tastes of the aristocracy.<sup>3</sup> Society was not given to serious reflection, and it found the issues of human life too deep for its consideration.

<sup>1</sup> Rappoport: English Drama

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Crouch: Puritans & Art

<sup>3</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry

What such an audience wanted was an entertainment which did not make too great emotional or intellectual demands. The preference was for plots full of exciting events and surprising turns of fortune.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this taste the form of drama which found greatest favour was tragic-comedy, in which the interest lay in intrigue rather than in masterly character study.

Of this shallow and artificial society, Beaumont and Fletcher are eminently representative. They made it their business to give a close transcript of Court life. Dryden, comparing them with Shakespeare, said that "they understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better, whose wild debaucheries and quickness of wit in repartees no poet can ever paint as they have done." A testimony to the truth of this criticism is to be found in the fact that their drama soon surpassed Shakespeare's in popularity. The brilliancy, the wit, and the movement of Court society, transmitted itself to their works. They accepted its standard of morality and its code of honour, though we must, in fairness, credit them with having sought, at times, to communicate to their drama conceptions of ideal and abstract virtue, by way of revulsion from the corruption they saw about them.

During the Restoration period, the stage was connected

<sup>1</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry

with the Court more closely than ever. It was principally the nobility who constituted the audience, and it was consequently they whose taste had to be gratified in the drama. On the accession of Charles II the love of luxury and splendour, and the lack of moral restraint which had begun in the reigns of the early Stuarts, came to a climax. The rigorous external discipline, imposed on England during the rule of the Puritans, had now come to an end. It had served to stem for a time the current of libertinism which circulated through the Court of Charles I, but being removed, the full flood of Sybaritism rushed on with greater strength than before. Supreme control was now in the hands of the votaries of the goddess Pleasure. "In London", says Macaulay, "the places most deeply infected were the Palace, the quarters inhabited by the aristocracy, and the Inns of Court." And it was precisely on the support of these parts of the town that the playhouses depended. They demanded a comedy which should give a true reflection of the manners of the Court. The society portrayed was ~~precisely~~ that set forth in Grammont's "Memoires", in which Honour and high moral standard were regarded - with an air of cynicism in the eyes of the Court - as belonging to the bourgeois.<sup>1</sup> According to Macaulay, "The comic poet was the mouthpiece of the most deeply corrupted part of a corrupted society.

<sup>1</sup> Ward: History of Dramatic Literature.

The Puritan had frowned at innocent diversions; the comic poet took under his patronage the most flagitious excesses."

Such was the iniquitous influence of the Court on the stage. It is a significant fact that when the drama was most truly national, then it flourished at its best, but immediately it allied itself to the narrower interests of the Court, and degraded Art in the service of false tastes, its downfall became inevitable. The Jacobean drama was tinged with the after-glow of Elizabethan brilliance, but the evil thing had entered in and had begun its work of destruction. With Charles I it continued its course of havoc, and during the Restoration period the ruin became complete. Dryden, in the last year of his life, seeking to palliate the flagrant errors of taste in which he and his fellow-dramatists had indulged, attributed their depravity to the Court.

"Perhaps the parson stretched a point too far,  
When with our theatres he waged a war.  
He tells you, that this very moral age  
Received the first infection from the stage;  
But sure, a banished Court, with lewdness fraught,  
The seeds of opening vice returning brought.  
The poets, who must live by Courts or starve,  
Were proud, so good a government to serve.  
Thus did the thriving malady prevail;  
The Court its head; the poets but the tail."

(b) Popular Plays Produced at Court.

On the accession of Elizabeth, and with the institution of an elegant, refined and dignified Court, there was a revival of the interest in drama. This not only led to the production of a large number of masques and plays, intended for presentation at Court, but it also gave stimulus to the popular drama. Several companies of actors were formed in emulation of those attached to the households of Leicester and other great noblemen. These companies were also under the patronage of the nobility, for unless a player had a patron he was not permitted to act.<sup>1</sup> In this way the Court, without hampering the evolution of the drama in its early stages, afforded it protection. It did not seek to impress its tastes on the national drama, but it encouraged popular playwrights by viewing and approving their performances at Court. Such influence, negative as it may seem, was invaluable to the early theatre in helping it to establish itself on a permanent footing.<sup>2</sup> While the national theatre was yet young, the Puritans were busy urging slings of hatred against the Queen's players in their public capacity. The accusation was that they were a common nuisance and that their occupation kept them from Church on Sundays. The adherents of the stage,

<sup>1</sup> Raleigh: Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> Ward: History of Dramatic Literature.

however, were more than they that were against it. The Court, disregarding the Puritans protests, clung tenaciously to its pet means of amusement, and, emboldened by this example, the nation followed suit. Their plea was that play-going "is an honest recreation", and that players must have practice in order to attain to the more perfection and dexterity when they appear at Court. As a result of this, plays, for the greater satisfaction of the Puritans, were put under the supervision of the Court Master of the Revels.

On the accession of James I all the acting companies of men were taken under the patronage of the Court, and the children's companies were included shortly afterwards. The royal family showed itself eager to extend patronage to the drama. In 1607 the Prince of Wales - at the age of nine - had one company, and the King and Queen two each. When Prince Charles arrived at nine years of age, he too became the patron of a company. The King's Company was, of course, the best and it speaks well for James' taste that he numbered Shakespeare among its members. Besides this, be it spoken in his honour, that the Globe Theatre, having been burned down in 1613, was rebuilt in the spring of the next year "at the great charge of King James and many noblemen and others." Such determined interest on the part of royalty afforded invaluable aid to the national stage, until the theatres were closed in 1642.

' Cited in *Godfrey's* : Times of the Stuarts

And here, again, the Court rendered inestimable service to the drama. During the period of prohibition the Court was unwearying in its efforts to produce plays, whether openly by license, or surreptitiously, in defiance of law. By this means it kept alive the national interest in play-going, so that when the Restoration came, the people were perfectly ready to enter upon a new dramatic era. As a result of this close link between the Court and national drama, it became the custom for popular plays to be presented at Whitehall on great occasions. Such must have been the conditions under which several of Shakespeare's plays were produced, for those which include a masque "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "The Tempest", "Henry VIII", and "Cymbeline" - could not have been presented with due elaboration on the public stage.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest popular plays of any note that were presented at Court are mentioned under the date 1594.<sup>2</sup> In that year, Kempe, Shakespeare and Burbadge were paid for two comedies, one on St Stephen's and the other on Innocents' Day. We know that one of these was Shakespeare's "Comedy of Errors", while it is conjectured that the other was "Richard III." In 1598 - 9 "2 Henry IV" was presented at Court with the ending altered for the occasion. In the year 1601, at about the time of the rebellion of Essex, the Court was offended by the presentation of "Richard II", which it

<sup>1</sup> Raleigh: Shakespeare  
<sup>2</sup> Fleay: Chronicle History of London Stage.



regarded in the light of an evil omen. This "put plays  
 out of favour this year", with the result that none were  
 shown at Christmas. A record of the next entertainments  
 allowed at Court would probably have proved interesting  
 as indicating the direction of Court taste, but unfortunately  
 the names of them are not given. In the second year of  
 King James's reign, after the mention of the works of Court  
 dramatists like Jonson and Dekker, we have record that the  
 "Moor of Venice" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor", were  
 produced at Court. "Love's Labours Lost", "Henry V" and  
 "The Merchant of Venice" were presented in 1605. The last  
 of these was so pleasing to the King that he ordered it to  
 be repeated two days after (February 12th.) This year is  
 remarkable for the production of seven plays by Shakespeare,  
 one by Heywood, two by Jonson, and one by Chapman, of which  
 the last two dramatists wrote frequently for the Court too.  
 From this it is evident that the national theatre was regarded  
 with the eye of favour by the entourage of the Sovereign.  
 In 1612 - 13 six of Shakespeare's plays are mentioned as  
 having been given at Court, while "The Hotspur" (1 Henry IV)  
 "All's Well" (?) and "Benedicte & Bettris" were represented  
 before the King's Majesty. The Stratford Poet's <sup>robust</sup> ~~favour~~  
 extended into the reign of Charles I. His tragedy and his  
 comedy were very well received, and we have evidence of royal

approval, especially in the case of "Cymbeline", of which it is said that it was "well liked by the King."<sup>1</sup> After the Restoration the Court monopolised the drama. All plays were written to suit the taste of the majority in the audience, which was the nobility. The respectable citizen rarely visited the theatre; hence no efforts were made to gratify his taste in the matter of drama.

(c) Plays written for Court Approbation and in accordance with Court Taste.

As we have already seen, the accession of Elizabeth marks a new era in the development of the drama. It was from the Court that the stimulus came. The Queen herself was fond of pageants and plays, in which her vanity was flattered, and her love of pleasure gratified. Between the years 1568 and 1580 no less than fifty-two plays were produced at Court. The Queen was wont to pay visits to her noblemen, and expected to be entertained with masques and pageants. Consequently it became the fashion for every courtier to include among his servants a company of actors.<sup>2</sup> In those belonging to the Earl of Leicester Elizabeth took personal interest. In 1574 she granted them a Royal Patent, by which she gave them permission to "use, exercise and

<sup>1</sup> Fleay: Chronicle History of the London Stage.

<sup>2</sup> Raleigh: Shakespeare.

occupy the art and faculty of playing Comedies, Tragedies, Interludes, Stage-plays, and such other like ... as well for the recreation of our loving subjects, as for our solace and pleasure, when we shall think good to see them." Such companies, though not bound exclusively to Court performance, were engaged to produce plays at Court on great occasions. In many of these dramas the playwrights made deliberate attempts to please by following the taste of their audience.

The most considerable of the Court dramatists was John Lyly. Being himself well-versed in the life of the Court, as well as an aspirant to the Mastership of the Revels by reason of the half-promises extended to him by the Queen, it suited both his genius and his ambitions to cater for the taste of his distinguished hearers. It is significant that Lyly confined himself to comedy, and that his characters, while eminently true from an external view, lack depth of psychological insight. This may be due to the fact that the Queen and her Court preferred rather to be amused than stirred or touched. Lyly lived in an atmosphere of affectation and ease; his characters, therefore, are correspondingly artificial, and lacking in that intensity of human feeling and passion of which the Stratford dramatist was master. In the world of Lyly's plays, as well as in that

of his daily life, everyone had, or affected to have, wit and high spirits. To sound the depths of real feeling would have been, to his audience, an evident sign of bad-breeding.

Closely allied with this superficial character study are the refinement and elegance of Lyly's drama, which may be attributed to the fact that it was written for the Queen and her ladies.<sup>1</sup> Almost all his plays are in the fashionable masque- or pastoral - vein; stories of courtly shepherds and lovely shepherdesses who perform graceful dances and sing dainty lyrics of the sweetest melody. In these the language is that of polite society. Devoid of the pedantic features of Euphuism, except in soliloquies and dignified discourses, Lyly's style is easy and polished, and he communicated to the drama that refinement of comic dialogue which was necessary for its further development. In the love interest too of his plays Lyly knew how to touch the taste of his audience. An age which prided itself on its 'gallanterie', which never wearied of singing praises in honour of feminine beauty, which studied with eager interest the passages in Castiglione relating to the correct courtly method of making love, would be sure to enjoy anything of this nature in its literature.<sup>2</sup> Lyly had tried his hand at this in "Euphues"

<sup>1</sup> Bond: Lyly.

<sup>2</sup> Courthope: History of English Poetry.

and his great success emboldened him to make another experiment in the same direction.

The mythological and allegorical references in which Lyly's plays abound, are due to direct Court influence. Of the fifty-two plays produced at Court between 1568 and 1580, we have record that eighteen of them dealt with ancient mythology. All Lyly's plays, with the exception of "Mother Bombie" seek to gratify this learned taste of the Queen and her followers. Besides this, the classical names served as an adequate screen behind which to represent Court personages. It would not have suited Lyly's purpose to be too open. Moreover he had this additional excuse for contemporary allusion, viz: the taste of the Queen for anything savouring of mystery or riddle. Elizabeth was fond of intellectual gymnastics. Fro<sup>w</sup>nde tells us that she was most unnatural in the language of her devotions, and we have evidence that Burghley, shortly before his death, composed complicated allegories to exercise the Queen's ingenuity and to afford her the satisfaction of having solved them. He says of her; "I think never a ladye besides her, nor a dicipherer in the courte, would have dissolved the figure to have found the sense as her Majestie hath done." Many of the masques and representations at Court, Lyly's

Feuillerat: Lyly.

included, depended for their interest on the interpretation of mystic meanings, and on the discovery of the persons whose characters and actions were darkly shadowed forth under allegorical names. To such an extent is this true that many of the allusions are unintelligible to the modern reader.

In 1584 Peele made his debut at Court with "The Arraignement of Paris" presented before the Queen by the Children of the Chapel Royal. It is a delightful pastoral drama, impressed with the Elizabethan love of Beauty, and rendered immortal by its lovely songs. As in the case of Lyly, the subject is taken from classical mythology, and the treatment is elegant and graceful in accordance with Court taste. Such was Peele's success in this kind of drama that he undertook another, "The Hunting of Cupid", in the same vein. Of this only a fragment is extant. Nash, too, in 1600 presented before the Queen at Croydon, a pastoral called "Summer's Last Will & Testament." It was specially designed for the entertainment of the Court. In its serious parts it is stately in manner; for its humour it depends on learned quips such as would be sure to satisfy the taste of his audience. There are, however, a few sly hits at the foibles of society. With the pastoral

element there is joined a fair display of masquerade, for which the Court showed a decided liking in its patronage of masques and pageants.

During the reign of the early Stuarts, the decline in the tone of Court life communicated itself, as we have already seen, to the drama. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, which were most avowedly based on Court taste, manifest a lack of delicacy, and an advance on the coarseness of expression tolerated in the previous reign. In the point of general construction the dramatists have kept their audience in view. Romantic plots and a strong love interest characterise nearly all their plays. In the case of "The Faithful Shepherdess" <sup>Beaumont &</sup> Fletcher reverted to the fashionable form of the pastoral. They both pandered to the courtly taste for novelty of incidents and plenty of action by crowding their works with an accumulation of thrilling events, and melodramatic scenes. Though love is the theme of all their plays, they succeeded in providing an extensive variety of situations, so that their pleasure-loving hearers could not complain of boredom. It is a remarkable fact that of their fifty-eight plays scarcely one scene resembles another. Their 'dramatis

<sup>1</sup> Beljame: "Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle

personae' were generally taken from that branch of society with which Beaumont and Fletcher were best acquainted, and their scenes were, more often than not, laid in the palaces of kings. The study of character, as in the case of Lyly, was not profound. The aim of the writers was to provide the Court with amusement, and not to "revolve the sad vicissitude of things." With this in view they lost no opportunity of displaying that wit which was so highly valued at James' Court, and for which the King himself could not forbear to pardon the most outrageous insults directed against his sacred person by the dramatist.<sup>1</sup>

The next reign bears marks of the more serious attitude of the King and a large part of his Court to the more important things of life. The King and Queen lived virtuous lives, and their beneficial influence on society has penetrated the drama. In "The Lady of Pleasure" we find Shirley praising

"Truth and your love of innocence, which shine  
So bright in the two royal luminaries  
At Court." (Act IV Sc. 3)

This does not mean to say that the whole of Charles' Court forsook their previous depravity for the pursuit of virtue.

<sup>1</sup> Crouch: Puritans & Art.



Much of the drama itself, with its coarseness of expression, is evidence enough that Milton was not wholly unjust in his assaults upon Comus and his followers. Yet there undoubtedly was a more serious element in the lives of some of the courtiers. It was as the mouthpiece of this side of society that Massinger, the chief romantic poet of the Court of Charles I, wrote his drama. His view of the courtier was by no means sympathetic, and as a contrast with his predecessors, Beaumont and Fletcher, he made no attempt to gratify courtly taste. On the contrary, he reverted to the form of the old Morality, and gave his plays a definitely didactic intention. He brought to light the ignoble practices of the nobility and measured their code of Love and Honour by the higher principles of a moral law.

It is in connection with the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, and the period of the early Stuarts, that the Masque must be considered as a form of drama produced at Court, and written with express regard for Court taste. It was by magnificent entertainments of this kind that great noblemen were accustomed to honour the Queen when she visited their houses. "All the courtiers", says 'Child 3' in the Induction to "Cynthia's Revels", "must provide for revels; they conclude upon a masque, the device of which is - that each

of these vices, being to appear before Cynthia, would seem other than indeed they are, and therefore assume the most neighbouring virtues as their masquing habit." The masque, as would seem from this, was of a moral nature, and often burdened with a double meaning, which as we have seen in the case of Lyly's allegory, would suit the royal and courtly taste for mystery and riddle. Moreover, as the masque was chiefly devised to provide entertainment at Court on great occasions, its chief note is flattery of the royal person in whose presence the performance was presented.<sup>1</sup>

During the reign of Elizabeth this form of entertainment was mostly in the nature of a gorgeous pageant, a mere procession of gods and goddesses, and allegorical personages. There was but little attention given to the literary side. It was not until 1603, when Jonson acquired favour in the eyes of the King, that the masque had any pretence to literary excellence. In that year Jonson was called in to welcome James' Queen, and the Prince Henry at Althorpe. This piece opens a new chapter in the history of the masque. Here splendour and magnificence were combined with literature and art, in an attempt to gratify the personal tastes of the King and Queen. Jonson was singularly fortunate in his patrons, both of whom were extremely fond of dramatic entertainment,

<sup>1</sup> Reuver: Les Masques Anglais.

and were ready to expend fabulous sums on their favourite form of amusement.

In 1604 Daniel, the Court poet, wrote a masque, "The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses", which was presented at the Court by the Queen and her ladies. But Daniel's work was artificial to a degree. He could excel in paying courtly compliment and in writing artificial compositions which required only the acceptance of given laws, but he could not endue the masque with the literary value it lacked. That was to be Jonson's work. The King and Queen soon perceived the inequality between the two men, and for a long time Jonson enjoyed their single approbation, much to the disquietude of Daniel.

In 1605 the Queen employed Jonson to write "The Masque of Blackness" in which she and her ladies were to take a speaking part. In this piece the Queen set limits to the poet's invention. She desired that she and her ladies should be represented as daughters of Niger in search of a face wash that would restore their blackened complexions. The elegance of Court taste may be deduced from this. Yet be it spoken in the favour of the Court that it knew how to appreciate a good thing.

It was not till 1609 that the next important influence

came from the Court. In the meantime Daniel had written a pastoral-masque "The Queen's Arcadia", which shows courtly taste and breeding in its grace and eloquence. In 1607 Campion, too, contributed a masque "Phoebus' Knights", for presentation before the King. In 1609 Jonson wrote his charming "Hue and Cry After Cupid", and "The Masque of Queens". This piece is quite a new departure in the history of the masque, and the alteration is due directly to Court interference. It is one of the earliest pieces containing an anti-masque, and Jonson's account of it is as follows:-

"And because her Maiestie (best showing that a principall part of life in these spectacles, lay in their varietie) had commanded me to think on some dance or show, that might precede hers, and have the place of a foile or false Masque; I was carefull to decline, not only from others, but mine owne steps in that kind, since the last yeere, I had an Anti-masque of boyes, and therefore now, devis'd that twelve women in the habit of hags or witches, sustayning the persons of ignorance, suspition, credulitie, etc., the opposites of good Fame, should fill that part; not as a Masque, but a spectacle of straungenesse, producing multiplicitie of jesture, and not unaptly sorting with the current, and whole fall of the device." The masque is in all respects typical of Court taste. It abounds in learned allusion which was

introduced to gratify the pedantic monarch.<sup>1</sup> It pleased him to think that he recognised this and that far-fetched phrase or conceit. Moreover, it satisfied the given condition of the masque in flattering the Queen, Bel-Anna. "The Maid's Tragedy" throws a side-light on to this custom.

Courtier: "Straton, you are a judge of poetry, what do you think of the ballet? Will it be good?"

Straton: As good as a ballet can be.

Courtier: As good as it can be?

Straton: Well, yes, the King has to be praised, compliments have to be addressed to the company, wedded folk blessed by the mediation of some god, the rules of flattery have to be observed."

Some poets objected to this custom. We find Shirley in "The Politician" (II,1.) railing against it, yet they were powerless to alter it, for patrons had to be humoured.

After the Queen's suggestion of an anti-masque, the fashion for them increased, so that it became the order of the day to introduce several of them into one piece. Jonson was irritated by the practice; it did not meet with his approval, nor did he succumb to it till it had been eighteen years in fashion. The courtier, Van Goose, in the "Masque of Augars", voices Jonson's opinion about the anti-masque. "De more absurd it be, and vrom de purpose, it be ever all de better." Yet

<sup>1</sup> Reyber: Les Masques Anglais.

without something to take its place he felt that he would lose his hold on the courtly audience. He therefore determined to make up the deficiency by a display of wit and verve. This eminently suited his genius by giving scope to his satirical powers. Moreover as it had been the custom to make reference in the masque to contemporary events at Court, he took the opportunity of ridiculing the foibles of the courtier, with the hope of improving the manners of society. Examples of this are to be seen in the already-cited "Cynthia's Revels", and in the character of Van Goose from "The Masque of Angurs" (1622). Jonson's instincts led him in the right direction, for the more serious tone of his work would be sure to draw the favour of the theological monarch, not to mention the more theologically-minded among his followers. At any rate the moral tone of his masques wrought him no harm, and until he retired in 1631 from the position of collaborator with Inigo Jones for providing Court entertainment, he enjoyed great success, in spite of the fact that Daniel made a last expiring effort in "Tethys' Festival" (1614) to regain lost favour.

Under Charles I the masque maintained a popularity equal to that accorded those produced under James I. During this reign Inigo Jones performed some of his finest feats of stage direction. It was owing to these Court performances, in which the Queen and her ladies used to take speaking parts, and for

which the Queen engaged the services of French actresses, that Prynne was prompted to write his famous "Histrio mastix." This, however, had no effect on the amusements of the Court, for in the same year (1634) the King was entertained by the four Inns of Court at the performance of Shirley's "Triumph of Peace", to which the Court gave a return masque, "The Temple of Love" written by D'Avenant, and presented by the Queen and her ladies. It is interesting to notice that the masques of this period show a change in tone, which seems to be due to the influence of Court Platonism.<sup>1</sup> They manifest however, a marked improvement in another direction, being divested in a good measure of the pedantry which was specially introduced to please King James, and having also almost entirely lost their grossness under the purer conditions of the new Court.

It was, nevertheless, during this reign that they became dangerous, by being made the instruments of the national discontent which brought about the Civil War. Under James I they had been surrounded with political importance, since it became the custom to make these entertainments the occasion of displaying England's attitude to foreign ambassadors.<sup>2</sup> But now we find them used as a vehicle of attack against the Puritans. The last masque proper was "Salmacida Spolia"<sup>3</sup> (1640)

<sup>1</sup> Upham: French Influence

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan: Masques of James I.

<sup>3</sup> Schelling. *English Drama*

We cannot pass from the study of this dramatic form without indicating in some measure the extent of its influence on the literature of the period. It soon became usual to introduce masques and shows into plays, either as the motive for a plot, or for spectacular effect. Shakespeare made use of this device on three or four occasions. Beaumont and Fletcher, too, have used it with great effect. Moreover, the poetry of the masque influenced the language of subsequent poets. Milton, for example, in his "Arcades", and the songs from "Comus", as well as in certain of his poems, gives evidence of having fallen under the influence of the masque. Besides this, the magnificence of these courtly presentations soon communicated itself to the national drama, and the introduction on the popular stage of a more elaborate kind of scenery did away with the need for much of the splendid description which lends such beauty to Elizabethan plays. But above all things, the masque is of importance in the history of the drama, as having kept alive in England a taste for drama during troublous and unpropitious times.

During the period of the Commonwealth the exiled members of the Court showed a laudable perseverance in their efforts to prevent a cessation of literary activities, especially in the drama. Principal among them was D'Avenant, who managed, under great difficulties to achieve several dramatic representations in England during the proscribed period



between 1642 and 1660. Such pieces are important as indicating the trend of Court taste after the Restoration. On the return of the "merry monarch", the theatres were immediately opened under the patronage of the King and the Duke of York. The stage was now divorced almost entirely from national interests, and became the instrument of the Court. In fact, the drama "lived by the breath of fashion and by the favour of a class." <sup>1</sup> In the "Essay on Dramatic Poesy", Dryden writes: "As for what you have added, that the people are not generally inclined to like this way (i.e. rhymed tragedy) ... if by the people you understand the multitude, ... 'tis no matter what they think; ... their judgement is a mere lottery." There was now a state of keen competition among the dramatists, who were usually hangers-on at Court, and he proved most successful who paid greatest attention to the taste of the King and those about him. Thus it was that Dryden, in direct contradiction of his genius, took to writing drama as a means of gaining a livelihood, and being possessed of an almost unparalleled capacity for absorbing his environment, he soon became one of the most prominent playwrights of his day.

The taste of the Court lay in the direction of foreign literatures, and especially, as might be expected from the nationality of the last Queen, from the place to which the

<sup>1</sup> Ward: History of Dramatic Literature.

exiled Court betook itself, and from the upbringing of the new monarch, in the direction of French literature. It is only fair to add, however, that all French influence in this period cannot be ascribed to the Court, since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes on 22nd. October 1685, brought a great influx of French people, for whom Churches were set apart and services conducted in their national tongue. Nevertheless, it is true that the French influence in the drama was due to the Courts both of Charles I and of Charles II. Bayes, the playwright in the "Rehearsal", presenting before his friends a piece he has written, "in the new manner to please some patrons of quality", prides himself on making the characters speak French occasionally "to show their breeding." The King himself had been brought up with an appreciation for Corneille, Racine and Molière. Therefore, anything in the way of English drama, intended to meet with his approval, had to conform to French dramatic canon. "Le roi, Charles II", writes the French critic, Charlanne, "se declara en faveur des sujets et des modèles français. Il faut attribuer à la cour l'apparition et le succès de la tragédie nouvelle appelée 'tragédie héroïque'."

Such then was the origin of the "heroic" plays which Dryden tells us in his "Dedication to the Indian Emperor", have "been wholly derived from the countenance and approbation they

<sup>1</sup> "La Litterature anglaise au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle"

have received at Court. The most eminent persons for wit and honour in the royal circle having so far owned them, that they have judged no way so fit as verse to entertain a noble audience, or to express a noble passion." These "Heroic" plays took their name from the grandeur of the passions they embodied. They dealt with Heroic Love, and Heroic Honour after the manner of the theatre of Corneille and of Racine. Further, in emulation of Corneille's experiments in the rhymed Alexandrine, the Restoration writers employed the heroic couplet in tragedy, as being better suited to the spirit of the play. Devoid of any instinct regarding the genius of our tongue, they did not perceive that whereas rhyme ennobles, nay, is even necessary to, French versification, in English, it gives when handled too freely a sing-song expression which is hardly consonant with the spirit of high tragedy. Imagine "King Lear" written in rhymed couplets! Yet we must remember that this is another instance of Court influence. We have seen above in Dryden's "Dedication" that the idea of using rhyme in tragedy came from "the royal circle." Moreover we have Orrery's evidence to the same effect in his defence of a rhymed tragedy of his, called "The Black Prince." He explains that it was written "in the new way, ... in the French Manner, because I heard the King declare himself more in favour of their Way of Writing than ours."

It is here, in comparison between French chefs-d'oeuvre and the English imitations, that we are able to make some

estimate of the ravages wrought on English drama through Court influence. In Dryden's words:

"The Drama's laws the Drama's patrons give

Those who live to please, must please to live."

and in consequence the high ethical standard of Corneille and Racine, the grandeur and sublimity of their sentiment had to be brought down to the level of Restoration Court life. It was merely in the externals that our dramatists were really able to keep to their models. They took plots from French drama and romance, they borrowed grand historic names and enchantingly distant scenes; all that was artificial and extravagant they imported from their French friends, but the morality is that of the Restoration. In short, English "Heroic" plays were a mere travesty of French works, and lofty French sentiment was replaced by so much empty verbiage and bombast. Villiers in the "Rehearsal" has made an amusing burlesque of the high-flown style of the Restoration tragedians, with admirable effect in the use of the rhymed couplet.

Parthenope: "My mother, sir, sells ale by the town walls

And me her dear Parthenope she calls.

Volscius: Can Vulgar vestment high born beauty shrowd?

Thou bring'st the morning pictur'd in a cloud.

Bayes: The morning pictur'd in a cloud! A gadscookers,  
what a conceipt is there!"

or again -

Bayes: Does not that, now, surprise you, to fall asleep just in the nick of time ... Now, here, she (Cloris) must make a simile.

Smith: Where's the necessity of that Mr. B.?

Bayes: Because she's surprised. That's a general rule; you must make a simile when you are surprised; 'tis the new way of writing."

Comedy was, however, the favourite amusement of the King. Its movement, its disguisings and its complicated intrigues pleased him. Crowne, in the Dedication of "Sir Courtly Nice" says: "The greatest pleasure that King Charles had from the stage was in the comedy, and he often commanded me to write it." It was at his special desire that Crowne wrote his "Sir Courtly Nice", and Sir Samuel Tuke his "Adventures of Five Hours", of which Pepys records that it was a great success, which is an interesting criticism in view of the account given in his "Diary" of Shakespeare's plays. Court influence here was not an unmixed evil, for though it communicated to comedy a low standard of morality, yet by its agency the gentlemen of the sock learned to endow their plays with brilliance of wit and conversation, with ease of manner and freedom of movement. At the Restoration this branch of drama reached its highest level, by reason of its sparkling wit and polished language, as well as by its truth to life, even to an unpleasant degree. It is an exceeding clever production, a worthy climax of the

'comedy of manners' begun by the "rare Bēn Jonson."

4. Flattery of the Sovereign and the Court.

Besides the fact that the drama adhered closely to the tastes of the Court, it also gave a great deal of attention to the flattery of royal persons, and to extravagant eulogy on their good qualities. Lyly shadowed forth the person of the Queen in the heroines of his plays, who are, of course, the embodiment of virtue and chastity. The Prologues, too, instead of being used, as was usually the case, to explain the plot, generally took the form of a dedication to his courtly audience. From beginning to end his plays are interspersed with flattery of "fayre Cynthia, whom tyme cannot touch, because she is divine, nor will offend because she is delicate." "This is she of whom ~~of~~ her courtiers" says Endimion, "are not allowed to talke but to wonder, because her vertues are not within the reach of our capacities. Tellus, Endimion's former love, waxes a little jealous at the extravagance of the praise bestowed on her rival.

Tellus: Why, she is but a woman.

End: No more was Venus.

Tellus: Shee is but a virgin.

End: No more was Vesta.

Tellus: Shee shall have an ende.

End: So shall the world.

Tellus: Is not her beautie subiect to time?

End: No more than time is to standing still.

Tellus! Will thou make her immortall?

End: No, but incomparable."

Peele, in his "Arraignement of Paris", has paid a very deft compliment to England and her Queen in the speech of Diana, in which she "describeth the Nymphe Eliza." First her dwelling-place is shown us "within these pleasant shady woods."

"The place Elizium hight, and of the place  
Her name that governes there, Eliza is,  
Her people are ycleeped Angeli,  
Or if I misse a lettre is the most,  
This peereles nymphe whom heaven and earth beloves,  
This Paragon, this only this is shee,  
In whom do meete so manie giftes in one,  
On whom our countrie gods do often gaze,  
In honour of whose name the Muses singe.  
In state Queene Junos peere, for power in armes,  
And vertues of the minde Minervæ's mate:  
As fayre and lovely as the queene of love:  
As chast as Dian in her chast desires."

Nash in "Summer's Last Will and Testament", followed the fashion of flattering the Queen, though he shows more skill, and more refinement of feeling in singing the praises of his sovereign. Summer's last injunctions regarding "Eliza

that is most sacred Dame" are charming in their delicacy and elegance.

"Autumne, I charge thee, when that I am dead,  
Be prest a serviceable at her beck,  
Present her with thy goodliest ripened fruities,  
Unclothe no Arbors where she ever sate,  
Touch not a tree thou thinkest she may passe by,  
And Winter, with thy wrythen frostie face,  
Smoothe up thy visage, when thou lookst on her,  
Thou never lookst on such bright maiestie:  
A charmed circle draw about her Court,  
Wherein warme days may dannce, and no cold come;  
On seas let winds make warre, not vexe her rest,  
Quiet inclose her bed, thought flye her breat."

Summer's reproach to the niggardliness of Christmas sounds like praise of the social life and hospitality of the Court.

"It is the honour of Nobility  
To keep high dayes and solemne festivals:  
Then, to set their magnificence to view,  
To frolick open with their favourites,  
And use their neighbours with all courtesie."

Even Shakespeare has not scorned to write in flattery of his sovereign. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" there is a passage in praise of "the fair vestal throned by the west", the splendour of whose Court seems to be reflected in his



description of Cleopatra.

"The barge she sat on, like a burnished throne,  
Burned in the water; the poop was beaten gold,  
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
The winds were love-sick with them."

Besides this, most of Shakespeare's historical plays were intended as flattery of the House of Tudor. Elizabeth boasted of, and really had, direct descent from the widow of Henry V, of whom, though he is not among his favourite creations, he has given a sympathetic treatment. Henry is endowed by the dramatist with just those qualities on which Elizabeth prided herself - a love of England, a respectable religious feeling, and ability as a ruler. It is significant, too, that English, Welsh, Scotch and Irish soldiers are represented as taking part in Agincourt, by which Shakespeare intended reference to the unity of the British Isles under Elizabeth, while King Henry's special commendation of Fluellen, "I do know him to be valiant", seems to reflect glory upon the nationality of Owen Tudor, from whom the Queen took direct descent. In "Macbeth" also Shakespeare makes reference to the union of the English and Scottish Crowns under James I, in one of the apparitions shown to Macbeth, and his eagerness to celebrate the alleged

powers of the first Stuart King in touching for the King's Evil has betrayed him into a singular breach of dramatic taste.

Jonson's play, "Cynthia's Revels", though first performed in 1600 and printed in quarto in 1601, was not published in folio until 1616. In the Preface to this edition - a very elegant little composition intended to take the eye of his sovereign - he denies that the Court of Cynthia was entirely given up to "powdering and perfuming", but proclaims that virtuous minds still have a place at Court. "Such shalt thou find some here, even in the reign of Cynthia - a Crites and an Arete." And then, with a compliment to James, he proceeds: "Now, under thy Phoebus, it will be thy province to make more." In one passage in the play, he undertakes to defend the virtue of Elizabeth's Court. Mercury expresses astonishment at the questionable characters that are allowed to lurk near the royal presence. Cupid explains "They are in her Court, Mercury, but not as stars; these never come in the presence of Cynthia. The nymphs that make her train are the divine Arete, Time, Phronesis, Thaumata, and others of that high sort. These are privately brought in, in this licentious time, against her knowledge, and like so many meteors, will vanish when she appears." In honour of the occasion when this play was

presented before the Queen, Jonson expanded the closing scenes by introducing two masques in which liberal praise was bestowed upon Cynthia and the virtue of her followers. The courtly last scene opens with a charming hymn to this "goddess excellently bright."

During the reigns of the early Stuarts it became rather the fashion to scoff at the monarch than to flatter him with elegant eulogies, such as were wont to be poured out before Elizabeth. Besides this, the national feeling of loyalty to the sovereign was on the wane. There were writers who catered for Court taste in the drama, but beyond this they did not pretend to include flattery or even an expression of approbation in their works. The dramatists of the Restoration, however, renewed this practice of offering incense to the King, as may be seen from the numerous flattering prologues and epilogues attached to the plays of the period. The sincerity of these expressions may be sounded from the history of Dryden's "Albion & Albanus." This piece was intended as a glorification of Charles, who is represented under the title of Albion; the Duke of York was Albanus. Unfortunately while the play was rehearsing for public representation, the King died; whereupon Dryden with the characteristic promptness of a courtier, altered the opera to meet the new circumstances, and laid himself out to secure the bounty of the new Monarch.

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